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ABSTRACT

Two workshops on rural education held at Highlander Research and Education Center brought together grassroots community activists, parents, teachers, and students from rural communities in Appalachia, the southeast, and 15 states east of Mississippi. The participants represented the experiences of white Appalachians, African-Americans, Native Americans, and rural New Englanders. The report combines the views expressed by participants in the Highlander convocation process with an overview of rural education issues derived from the literature and data sources. It starts with the questions: What is education and Who is it for? The notion that education's primary purpose is to produce informed and empowered citizenry, not merely to produce a workforce, is emphasized. It considers the issues of curriculum, emphasizing the importance of community involvement in education. The sorting and screening function of schools is examined. School tracking systems and other labeling practices are questioned as reflecting class or racial discrimination. In addressing issues of financing and decision making about school policy, unequal funding of rural, as compared to urban, districts is discussed. The report concludes with accounts of communities that have organized to make changes in how their school systems work. Appendices include: (1) a sample Community Education Profile, produced by the Center for Literacy Studies for participants in the convocation; (2) a story about getting information about school systems from the Federal Government; (3) a list of resources for communities seeking to make changes in their educational systems; and (4) a list of participants in the convocation. (KS)

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A FOOT IN THE DOOR

RURAL COMMUNITIES INVOLVED IN EDUCATIONAL CHANGE

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University of Tennessee, 1990
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Richard Gray and Judy Johnson of National Coalition of Advocates for Students for providing relevant statistics;

Barbara Hatton, Deputy Director, Education and Culture Program, Ford Foundation, for review of this report and for providing support and encouragement;

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PREFACE

The crisis in education in the United States is by now widely recognized. We see schools closing or cutting back for lack of funds, soaring dropout rates, deepening racism, culturally inappropriate, class-based or Eurocentric curricula. Despite many attempts at educational reform since the 1960's, the problems continue, as do the concerns of parents, teachers and communities about how to improve the situation.

While the national debates about education are ongoing, we've heard little about the way that education issues affect rural communities, especially African-American, Appalachian, and other ethnic communities in rural areas. And, in the proposals for reform, often absent are the voices of grassroots community organizations and leaders who are struggling for educational *quality* and *equality* in their communities.

This report comes out of two workshops at Highlander which brought together grassroots community activists, as well as parents, teachers and students, to discuss their concerns for rural education and their strategies for bringing about effective change. The first workshop, held in February, 1990, brought together 12 participants from rural communities in eleven states in Appalachia, the southeast, and New England. The second workshop, held in May, 1990, brought together some 30 participants from fifteen states east of the Mississippi. All of the participants are people who are directly affected by the educational crisis, and who work for and with rural poor communities. They represent experiences of African-Americans in Arkansas, Georgia, Mississippi, South Carolina, Alabama; of white Appalachians and southerners in Tennessee, West Virginia, Kentucky, Virginia and Georgia, of Native Americans in North Carolina, of rural New Englanders in New Hampshire, Vermont and Massachusetts.

In each of the communities, education concerns are strongly and intensely held. In each case, there is a feeling that grassroots voices have not been heard, that there is need for broader participation in debates on education. In the report, the participants identify the most pressing problems which they have experienced with the education system in their communities. They express their hopes and dreams as to what education ought to be, and describe the successes and barriers which they have faced as community leaders and activists in attempting to bring about change.

Our hope is that this report will help to add new voices and new experiences to the debates on the educational crisis and the paths for change. We hope that

the report will be read and discussed by a broad audience — by other community groups and activists, by teachers and students, by policy makers, by grant-makers. We also hope that the statements here will be joined by the voices of others who are also working to improve the quality of rural education.

The Highlander Center is a non-profit independent education center with a long history of education on social change and social issues in the South. Our work is based upon the belief that those most affected by pressing issues — such as education — have the power to analyze their experiences and to bring about change through their own action. We believe that the statements in this report by community activists help once again to show the wisdom and insights which come "from the people" at the grassroots who are affected by policy debates.

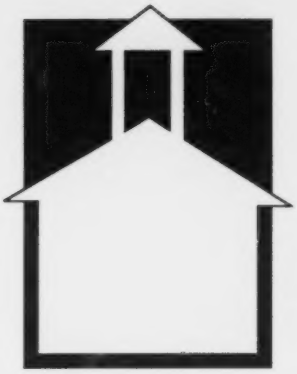
We would like to acknowledge and to thank many people who have contributed to this project. Most of all we thank the workshop participants who gave freely of their time, knowledge and energy. Jane and Hubert Sapp, Vicki Creed and Linda Martin provided the early leadership for the project and taught others of us about the depth of the concerns which grassroots rural communities feel about education. Jane Sapp and Vicki Creed worked with us to organize and facilitate the workshops. Connie White and Juliet Merrifield of the Center for Literacy Studies at The University of Tennessee, Knoxville took on the enormous job of documenting the workshops and writing up this report in a way that was true to the participants' experiences and which also spoke to a broader audience. Ruth Queen Smith and North State Video videotaped parts of the May workshop, and are making a video summary which will also be available from Highlander.

Several of the participants in the workshop process returned to Highlander in September to review and to make suggestions on this report and on the video. For this we thank Christina Johnson, Connie Tucker, Page McCullough, Veronica Thomas and Judy Martin. Jonathan Sher, education writer and consultant, Hubert Sapp, Springfield College, and Courtney Cazden, Harvard School of Education also made helpful comments on the draft report. Barbara Hatton, Deputy Director of the Culture and Education program of the Ford Foundation helped to provide support for the project in financial and other ways.

We at Highlander deeply appreciate the visions, commitment and insights shown by each of these people and the communities they represent. We hope to continue to facilitate programs to help empower these and other grassroots communities in their efforts to improve education in rural communities. We invite those of you interested in learning more about our work, or interested in sharing your own experiences, to contact us.

Ron Davis and John Gaventa, for the staff
Highlander Research and Education Center

INTRODUCTION



Rural education has two faces for the world. One face, perhaps viewed through rose-colored lenses, is a romantic vision of education rooted in the earth and community, small-scale, democratic, in touch with community values, enjoying community support. The other face, a much different one, is of second-rate education, inevitably inadequate, a narrow and out-of-date curriculum taught in decrepit buildings by aging and old-fashioned teachers.

Either face portrays rural education as unique. Neither fits the reality as viewed by members of the communities who participated in the Highlander Rural Education Convocation. In the view from these communities, rural education is not the same everywhere. All rural communities are not alike, and all rural families are not alike. Some of these differences affect their experiences with education. Race, class and power are key issues which the conventional views of rural education often ignore. In some aspects rural schools are unique, and have problems (and potential solutions) in common. In other aspects, the problems that beset rural schools are also those that beset urban (especially inner city) schools.

Education issues cannot be seen in isolation from their local context. They become issues within a setting that has a particular culture, economy, racial and class makeup, and political alignment. Different issues assume significance in different kinds of communities. The same issues may take different forms in different settings. Consolidation, for example, may lead to the loss of local democratic control in one context, as it has in many rural Appalachian communities, but in a different setting may have the potential for increasing democratic control of school systems by breaking down racial barriers.

Both class and race may create divisions *within* rural communities, which affect education. Because rural areas are often poorer than urban areas, rural education systems as a whole are consistently less well-financed than urban ones, and have greater difficulty providing facilities, resources and rewards for more highly qualified teachers. But the poorest kids and children of color in rural areas often suffer the greatest hardships in education. These students may be discriminated against in tracking and in discipline practices; they may be housed in the worst school buildings with the fewest resources; or they may be bused to large consolidated schools where they are mocked for being "hicks" or "hillbillies." Their teachers may not understand or appreciate their culture or context.

Power is the issue at the core for many parents and activists as they work for educational change in their communities. Who controls, who decides, in whose interests decisions are made, whose needs are met — these are underlying issues for parents, teachers and students.

These issues are common in many communities, in rural as well as urban areas. Here they are played out through distinctively educational terms — consolidation, curriculum, discipline and tracking, financing and decision-making by school boards and state legislatures.

Many of these issues are technical and hard for parents and local activists to grapple with. Education has often been seen as the domain for experts, but needs to become an area in which communities can develop their own perspective and voice. Educational researchers have a valuable role to play in improving schools, along with parents and community members. Schools need to be deeply connected with their communities, but also open to drawing information, resources and support from others outside the community who can contribute.

The concerns about education that communities in rural areas have expressed cannot simply be met by educational reform from above. No single educational system that we can imagine could meet the concerns of all parents in all kinds of communities. In fact, differing interpretations of issues, differing visions and solutions were sought by participants in the Highlander convocation. The common thread is a desire for increased local democratic control of educational systems, which provides opportunity for flexible and unique solutions to be developed by communities.

Currently, local school systems often have the appearance of democratic institutions, with elected school boards or superintendents. But in practice they often represent only part of the community, and democracy is restricted to the few. Decisions about key aspects of education need to be made by parents who send their children, as well as by teachers and others in the community.

Historically there have been recurring difficulties in developing really effective national reform movements in education. People are isolated from one another, without over-arching institutions within which to share perspectives and develop strategies. There may now be a "moment" in which national and local concerns about education mesh. Nationally, education has become a prominent issue, with corporate heads and politicians leading the way. Locally, education concerns parents and teachers who have had little chance to connect beyond the local level with other parents and teachers, and little chance to have input into the national debate. This may be the time for the two ends of the education spectrum to come together.

This report presents a view of education "from the ground up" — from the perspective of parents, community members, students and teachers. They came to the Highlander convocation from different kinds of communities, in different states, facing different forms of educational systems. They differed in their views on various concrete issues of educational reform. They were united by their concern about education and their efforts to change local educational systems to more closely reflect local needs and interests.

The report combines the views expressed by participants in the Highlander convocation process with an overview of rural education issues derived from the literature and data sources. It starts with the big questions: What is education and who is it for? It moves on through the issues of curriculum, the sorting and screening function of schools, financing and decision-making about school policy. It concludes with stories about communities which have organized to make changes in how their school systems work.

Appendices to the main report include: a sample *Community Education Profile*, [one of a series produced by the Center for Literacy Studies for participants in the convocation]; getting information about your school system; other resources for communities seeking to make changes in their educational systems; and a list of participants in the convocation. It is hoped that the report will help communities place their own concerns and issues in a broader context, and gain ideas and inspiration from the experiences of other communities.

WHAT IS EDUCATION? WHO IS IT FOR?

[In my vision] *Everyone will see themselves as learners. There is no territorial ownership. The family becomes a welcome partner in education. The school system encourages and seeks participation of families. Social agencies support the school systems. Teachers are given the power to make decisions. Instead of one teacher responsible for a class, a team of teachers shares responsibility. Teachers see themselves as educational facilitators and coordinate a variety of resources from the community. There is real parent involvement in decision making. That's different from just selling hot dogs!*

Bucky Boone
Washington County Office on Youth
Abingdon, Virginia

What is education, and who is it for? These questions have been argued throughout this country's history, and today they are as much an issue as ever. Is education's major purpose to produce a work force—diligent and competent workers who will meet the needs of business and industry? Is education's primary purpose to produce an informed and empowered citizenry? Or what other vision should drive our educational system today? The ways in which these questions are answered will continue to determine the nature of American education, both rural and urban.

The question of education and the economy is particularly problematic for rural areas. As this country industrialized, jobs became scarcer in rural areas. Today, that scarcity is exacerbated, especially in the South, by the decline in manufacturing and the growth of urban-centered service industries.

Some rural areas are worse off than others. Acute job losses are being experienced in coal mining areas where the mines have closed; agricultural areas where farms are continuing to mechanize and consolidate; and rural areas which have depended on manufacturing jobs. Other economic problems beset tourism and second-home areas where jobs for locals are mainly low-wage and low-skill. If education is to produce workers, some may suggest that it is not worth educating children in such rural areas.

When we first started our education program we talked with colleges about offering classes in the community. Some of the faculty knew a little about Campbell County. They asked why people would want to go to school since there were no jobs there. They were saying, if there aren't jobs, what's the point of educating people?

Anne Hablas
Mountain Women's Exchange
Jellico, Tennessee

Alternatively, in rural areas, education may be seen as preparing young people to leave their communities — to take jobs elsewhere. Communities are often caught in the difficult situation of asking residents to finance improved education while knowing that many of the better educated young people will leave to use their talents elsewhere.

We helped a community group do a survey about community development. One of the questions on the survey was, "What do you think a successful education would be?" Seventy percent of the parents said a good education is one that teaches my children how to leave this area to get a job someplace else. So our education system is a way of rural communities committing suicide. That sets up a contradiction. We want the schools to be ours and to develop the community, yet the economic system is saying that the schools have to teach people how to leave the community, to shut it down.

John Gaventa
Highlander Research and Education Center
New Market, Tennessee

The increasing emphasis on education for jobs is worrisome on another front. Parents see that many of the new jobs for which education is supposed to prepare their children are low-skill, low-wage service jobs, not the highly skilled, technical occupations we hear so much about as the jobs of the future.

Hardeeville is right off I-95. In our area there's a lot of tourism. We're close to Hilton Head. We know that the business people want to keep a certain level of education so the young people will have to work at Wendy's and Burger King and McDonald's. There are people paying a million dollars for homes at Hilton Head. They need someone to clean their house and keep the lawn nice. Someone has to water the golf course.

Veronica Thomas
Taxpayers Advocacy Support Coalition
Hardeeville, South Carolina

The parents and community activists who participated in the Highlander convocation had alternative visions for education in their communities. They want education that can help teach children how to remain on the land and build viable lives there. They want quality education for *all* children, education to reinforce values, to build communities, and contribute to their social, economic and political health.

As a birthright, every citizen would have access to an effective education in their respective communities, regardless of the relative wealth of their families. And that's not such a wild idea because most industrial countries already do it, we're just the last on the block to wake up. I would cease talking about students and parents. Everybody would be a student. Everybody would decide together what they wanted for their education.

John Bloch
School of Human Services
Littleton, New Hampshire

At the local level, many activists question the wisdom of permitting corporate America to call the shots in education. Some say that education is an easy victim to blame for business mismanagement and economic woes. Others have called for partnerships with local businesses.

> *We have to make changes locally. Industry is saying they are having problems with workers. They are willing to become involved with the schools.*
>
> Lamar Moody
> Carrollton, Georgia

While industries have been vocal in expressing their need for an educated work force, on the whole they have not been forthcoming in financial support. Several widely publicized national and regional corporations have established programs which provide money for education. Adopt-a-school programs flourish, providing marginal support for individual schools. However, business interests have repeatedly fought changes in the state and local tax structures, the major source of funding for education.

The ends to which education is put influence its content. American ideals of an educated citizenry include not only reading and writing but also the ability to think critically, creatively, proactively and inclusively; to question government, businesses and themselves. An educational system primarily designed to prepare people to fill job slots may not produce a citizenry ready to be involved in making decisions which affect their lives and the future of their communities.

> *I want people to learn how to resolve differences, learn respect and trust and community building ... participate in community activities, take initiative and follow through ... I want people to vote! There's a lot of things people should learn at school ... people really don't believe they have the right to go to City Council and tell them they don't like the sewer rates ... to bring about change. They think it's a very mysterious sort of thing. It's about being democratic.*
>
> Page McCullough
> Durham, North Carolina

> *That's very difficult because most people involved in schools don't understand the democratic process. And most families don't, so kids have no models ... Teachers have to be willing to have their authority questioned. Right now it's "I rule this classroom." That has to change if kids will ever be able to see democratic processes modeled in the schools.*
>
> Christina Johnston
> Worcester, Vermont

> *The only way we've been able to deal with that is by incorporating democratic processes in our summer camp curriculum. That's how the children learn about it. They form townships and other groups where they make decisions collectively. That's the only experience with democracy that our kids get in the Alabama Black Belt. In order for us to develop community-focused black youth leadership, we are having to undo the damage of miseducation and tracking. For many young people, participation in our camps is the first time they've been exposed to positive images of black youth. We offer both weekend camps and 8 to 10 day camps in the summer, mostly in Alabama but now in some other states, too. Skills learned at the camp are applied on the local level through our chapters, with activities focusing on solving school and community problems. We've been doing these camps for five years now. We started out in five counties and it just grew. Now we have an average of 200 kids in each camp session. Although the training is done from an Afro-centric perspective, our goal is to be multi-ethnic and we encourage all races to attend. We realize that racism hurts all kids, both black and white.*
>
> Connie Tucker
> B.E.S.T. - 21st Century Youth Leadership
> Training Project
> Selma, Alabama

In contrast to the ideal of education for citizenship, the current emphasis on standardized testing has encouraged school systems to think of education as a collection of isolated skills. Doing well on the tests has become an end in itself.

> *The ability to think critically or make rational decisions has no meaning in school. You can't tell if a child is capable of going out into the world and dealing with life choices by testing her ... I have this idea of doing away with grades. I think that a kid should go to school until she masters requirements for survival, for what it takes to live in this world. Kids need to think critically, have the vision to figure out what they want. Forget about grades and tests.*
>
> Anne Brown
> Rural Organizing and Cultural Center
> Lexington, Mississippi

Parents and teachers are disappointed that even though children may learn to read and write, they still may not be able to use their knowledge to improve their lives and communities. In all of the public debate about education in rural areas, there has been little discussion of the role education might play in community development. Rural communities more than ever need education for their young people to change, to adapt to a changing world order, to develop their own resources and construct their own community development.

Questions about what education is, and who it is for, have come out of the struggle of parents, teachers and communities trying to understand why schools often fall so short of what we hope for. Answers do not come easily, and are often complex. Although there is much diversity in the way parents and concerned groups approach educational issues, there is agreement on some things: Education is for children, families and communities; education is not about learning skills in isolation or preparing for tests, but is about the way we live our lives and the decisions we make; things that are good for corporate profits are not always good for communities or for education; and communities and parents should have a say in educational decisions that affect their children. Convocation participants presented their own visions of what education could be, and what it could mean to people and communities.

CURRICULUM AND COMMUNITY

Rural communities are not often regarded as diverse, especially in contrast to the ethnic diversity of many urban areas. But most rural communities have class divisions, and many have racial divisions. These may make it difficult to develop a curriculum that is related to local culture and values — one has to ask *whose* culture and *whose* values. The standardization of formal curriculum, which increasingly is a response to the demand for better quality education, may seem to many parents as designed to homogenize their children to fit the dominant culture. Parents working for educational change often seek a curriculum sensitive to differences, that teaches inclusiveness and acceptance of a variety of human experience.

"Curriculum" is everything that happens in school, including interactions on the bus, in the halls, on the playground, in the bathrooms. It includes interactions with *all* the adults at school. Children learn not just from textbooks and class discussions, but from watching all the ways in which students are treated, by sensing expectations, by knowing first-hand the effects of stated and unstated school policies and practices.

> *I think teachers should get training on how to deal with low income kids, because they aren't learning as well. Now I'm not putting all the blame on the schools, if we as parents would help ... the teachers should take a little more time with our children. I know a number of times my little grandson would come home and say "I raised my hand up and the teacher told me to put my hand down." When the teacher says that, he gets the feeling, "I don't belong here" ... you know how kids are. I hope that the parents would work more with their children, and the teachers would take more time with the kids.*
>
> Rose Mary Smith
> Gulf Coast Tenants Association
> Marrero, Louisiana

Parents and other participants in the Highlander convocation expressed the strongly-felt conviction that participation in the school curriculum should offer continuing opportunities for children to experience success and a feeling of competence. Respect for all children and their unique ways of learning should be primary.

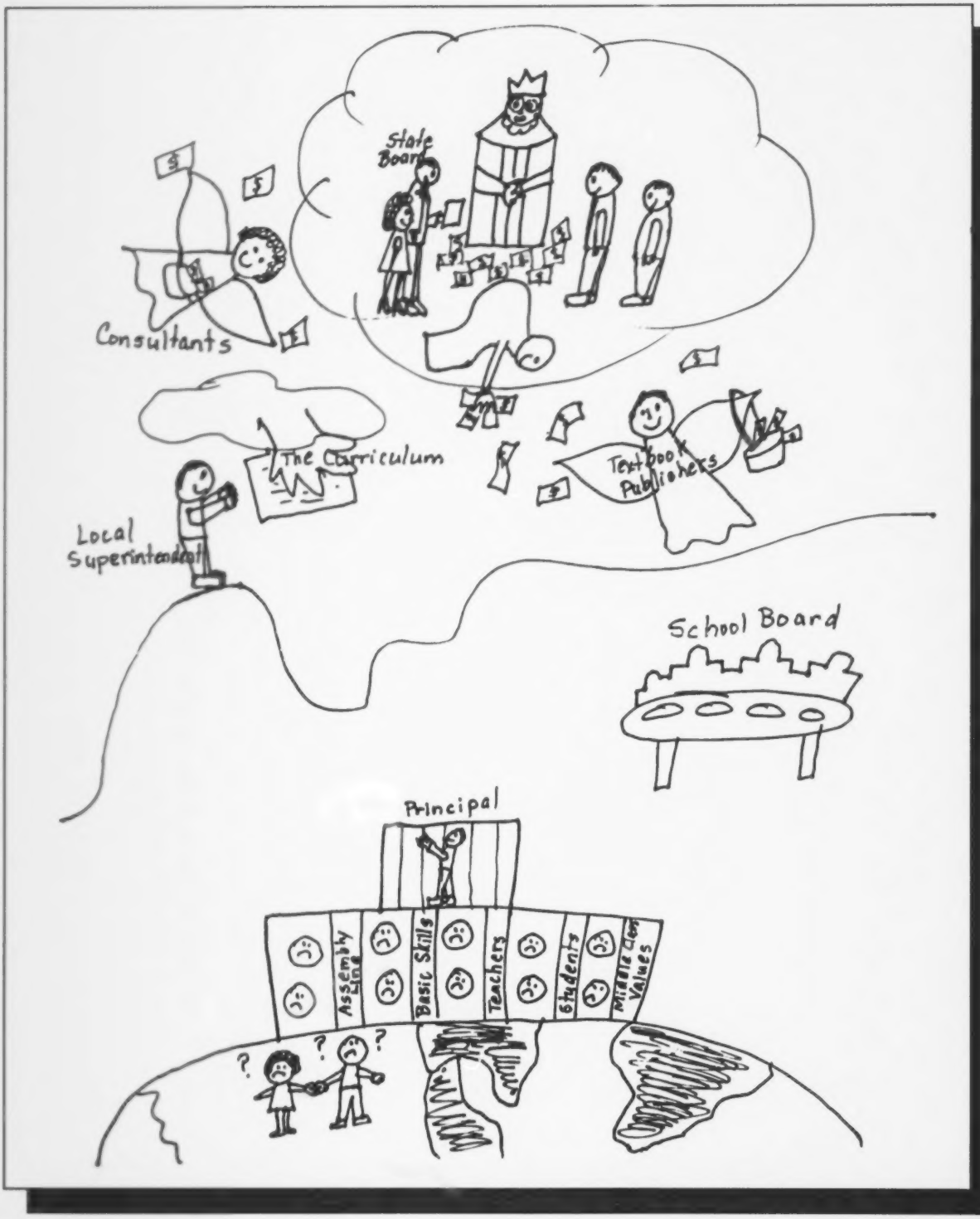
What we learned by working in our parents' group was the importance of acceptance of each child and the learning style they have, the value of that child. We're teaching math, but we're also teaching that each person is important. We put lots of emphasis on self-esteem and the learning environment. What's important is not just teaching subject matter, it's teaching children to believe in themselves in such a way that the expectation is there that the child will succeed. We've found that seven different kids can learn math seven different ways, but only one of them is thought to be right by teachers. Sometimes we forget to respect all the ways of learning.

Judy Martin
Appalachian Communities for Children
McKee, Kentucky

A group of parents and teachers from several states designed a poster at the convocation to express their frustration with the current system. One group member described it in this way:

You must all realize that curriculum is a very holy document. It's given from those above, with their heads in the clouds. Up there in the clouds is very different from what goes on here on earth. In the clouds there is a holy ruler, and that is the State Superintendent. He wears purple denoting royalty. We have the State Board who are always in obedience so their heads must be bowed at all times. They submit learned documents to him for study. We have one female person here. She's a little smaller than the males because her opinion is considered so. The State Superintendent has lots of money to give away. He has one assistant who doles out money at his command. His hands are folded because he doesn't do anything. He just directs. The consultants, textbook publishers and professors of education flit about, collecting and producing very learned ideas, theories and publications on learning. They collect this money and become wealthy. They are in the clouds also. They have no feet because they don't stay on the ground very long. The State Superintendent hands down the curriculum to the local Superintendent who patiently waits with his hands outstretched for guidance. It comes down from out of the clouds because the State Superintendent doesn't leave from his holy place. Then the local Superintendent receives this curriculum which the textbook publishers, consultants, and professors of education have contrived and the State Superintendent has approved and sent money down for. The local Superintendent stands on a mountaintop because he is quite above everything else that goes on. The school board members sit there — these are school board members, though they may look like bumps on a log — they are sitting at the last supper patiently waiting on word from the local Superintendent to be delivered to them. Down here on earth we have the principals, the children and the teachers. If you notice, you can't tell the children from the teachers, can you? That's because they're indistinguishable. They look kind of unhappy, don't they? That's because they're in prison. They're imprisoned by basic skills and lack of values. The principal is in his own private prison, but he gets some privileges and gets his own cell. Below the school we have the parents who stand around helplessly and want to know what's going on. They don't really know what the curriculum is, but they're unhappy because their children are in prison.

Veronica Thomas
Taxpayers Advocacy Support Coalition
Hardeeville, South Carolina


State Board
Consultants
The Curriculum
Textbook Publishers
Local Superintendent
School Board
Principal
Assembly Line
Basic Skills
Teachers
Students
Middle Class Values

Some of our most cherished assumptions about curriculum of rural school systems have to do with flexibility and responsiveness to community needs. We want to believe that local school boards, administrators, teachers and parents are able to shape and mold curriculum to fit the unique needs of the community. We may assume that the smallness of the systems makes it possible to move easily among state requirements, local system standards and parental wishes. For an increasing number of rural communities, that does not seem to be the case. School days are crowded by inflexible curriculum mandates concerning what is studied, how it is taught, and the amount of time spent on each curricular area.

> *One barrier that we've had is a court decision from Lincoln County that said that the funding mechanism of schools was preventing equality. But instead of getting better, it's becoming more standardized. The State Department of Education was the defendant in the suit, but the court appointed them to be the ones who would figure out the remedies. Now all first and second graders have to spend a certain number of minutes on reading and they all have to do it at the same time each day.*
>
> Beth Spence
> Lincoln County, West Virginia

Parents and other activists at the convocation expressed their concerns about standardized testing and its influence on curriculum. Many felt that curriculum is driven by standardized tests, so the test-makers are determining what is important, what is not, and what our children will be taught.

> *The average child in North Carolina takes 18 standardized tests for the state before they leave school. Teachers are not stupid and they don't want to look bad. Nobody wants their school to look bad. Parents believe this stuff is the gospel. Test results are printed on the front page of the newspaper and then you know where the "good" schools are and where the "bad" schools are ... all that corrupts the curriculum, I think. So much of the test content is isolated skills and information and literally, you are not rewarded for making connections. But one of the most important parts of education is thinking critically, learning to make connections. So it's a real problem.*
>
> Page McCullough
> Durham, North Carolina

We need to rethink the ways we deal with creating standards for achievement, as well as the ways children are taught.

> *What we are considering is how you can create standards that parents can strive for with their children, but those standards having enough flexibility so that they don't create frustration for children who may literally not be able to achieve. You can't have everybody come out at the same spot by the end of high school. It's impossible. Some will be here, some over there. That's what diversity within the school is. But to have every child move as far in the direction they chose to go is what we need to be working toward. Parents and children need to know that students won't be stopped at some point, just passed through without any kind of accomplishment. It takes constant vigilance to achieve that. It's very hard to do.*
>
> Christina Johnston
> Worcester, Vermont

Retention may also be seen by parents as a form of tracking. Too often, they feel, poor children and children of color are held back in the early years of school once or even twice, without enabling them to

"catch up" to their grade level skills. Then later, the same children are simply "passed on" from grade to grade, never reaching the standards expected. When schools retain children for one, two, or even three years, children learn early and well that they cannot achieve and are not expected to succeed. As they approach high school, already years older than their classmates, socially and academically isolated, there appears to be every reason to drop out and practically no reason to continue in school.

The over-emphasis on formal tests parallels the standardization of the curriculum, and both seem to reflect a broad attempt to standardize the "product" which schools turn out — students with the same values, beliefs, language and ways of living. Our image of small, community-centered schools whose staff and students value their unique rural cultural heritage frequently does not fit the reality. Many rural schools are large, impersonal schools whose well-intentioned staff want their students to be indistinguishable from urban counterparts.

> *What schools do is separate children from their families. You feel rooted in a certain situation, thriving, good things are happening in terms of how you feel about yourself — then it's almost like being uprooted, not having the sense of being grounded. One time I was in this classroom and they were talking about babies and families, and this little girl raised her hand. "Teacher, teacher! My papaw makes over a little youngun something awful!" She felt she was contributing something meaningful to the discussion. But this teacher stood her up in front of the class and made an example of her. She said, "I want the rest of you children to listen to what I'm saying. In this classroom we never say 'papaw'. I don't want to hear that word again all year. We say 'grandfather'. We do not say 'makes over'. We say 'likes'. We don't say 'little youngun'. We say 'child'." So this little girl's words are all gone. She is defeated. I watch her and all the time I'm there, that little girl never raises her hand again. I talked to the teacher about her goals and what she wants to accomplish. And she's from the county where the school is. She said, "My goal is to get these kids out of here." To her, everything mountain was second class. Sometimes it seems that teachers from the local area feel that they are less somehow, and they have to put down home, put down who they knew when they grew up. I think they get it from college, where professors teach that what your home was is no good.*
>
> Judy Martin
> Appalachian Communities for Children
> McKee, Kentucky

Other workshop participants described how African-American children can be led toward a negative self-image by a curriculum that ignores and misrepresents African-Americans:

> *It's worse than that. Not only is curriculum not representative of the community, it's actually miseducation. We learn to hate ourselves by going to school. During segregation there was an informal curriculum that black kids were exposed to that they don't have now. Now they only learn about a few black people in school. Some books actually portray slaves as happy. All the images we have of ourselves are negative.*
>
> Connie Tucker
> B.E.S.T.
> Selma, Alabama

In our sixth grade social studies, we are studying ancient civilizations—the Egyptians, the Sumerians, the Greeks, the Romans ... Hannibal was black, but the book doesn't tell you that. He led 40,000 men across the Mediterranean Sea and through the mountains of Italy. He was a great military strategist. Those facts are listed in the book. But there's nothing in the book that says this person was black! We all assume he was white. So these black kids aren't relating this to themselves.

Veronica Thomas
Taxpayers Advocacy Support Coalition
Hardeeville, South Carolina

Another example of what's left out of books comes from West Virginia. It's said that Appalachian people are individualistic and can't get along. In fact, West Virginia has the highest percentage of people in unions of any state in the country because of the history of miners. The union did a survey of what was taught in the state history course in high school. The only "union" mentioned in the whole textbook was Union Carbide Corporation.

John Gaventa
Highlander Research and Education Center
New Market, Tennessee

Eliot Wigginton's marriage of respect for culture and tradition with involved learning in the Foxfire series is one of the notable exceptions that have emerged out of programs rooted in communities and cultural values across the region. *Bloodlines*, a magazine of African-American pride and culture, is written by students in the Lexington, Mississippi area with help from the Rural Organizing Cultural Center (ROCC, see page 13). The Eastern Kentucky Teacher's Network encourages valuing community- and tradition-based knowledge and assists teachers in finding ways to use local resources to help students gain knowledge that is relevant to their lives. Efforts such as these resist cookie-cutter education which seeks to homogenize rural and culturally-different children.

They also demonstrate that rural schools *can* provide high quality education without enforced standardization and without mass consolidation. Part of the national debate about the quality of rural education focuses on whether small schools can offer a range of curricular opportunities. Rural education activist Jonathan Sher (1988) argues that the key ingredients in high quality rural schools are first-rate teachers (and few argue that rural schools are without their share of good teachers) and a narrowed, focused curriculum. Sher believes:

> "....consolidating entire schools (and school districts) in order to provide quality courses in calculus, inorganic chemistry and advanced Spanish seems an incredibly inefficient, uncreative and wrenching method of solving a teacher supply/instructional delivery problem ... Small, rural schools should thrive in an era that honors a limited, focused well-rounded curriculum ... When a premium is placed on doing a few things well, rather than trying to be all things to all people, small rural schools *are* in a position to compete successfully with larger systems — and to excel." (p. 15,16)

RURAL ORGANIZING AND CULTURAL CENTER

ROCC has been in existence since 1978. It started out with five people who called themselves Concerned Citizens of Holmes County. You need to understand that our county is very poor; government statistics say we're the fourth poorest in the nation. We have a high illiteracy and a high drop out rate. Those first members organized a survey of needs in the community. The people of the county had named issues of police brutality, social services, education and jobs as their concerns. ROCC is a grassroots group and the people decide for themselves what they want to do about problems.

Our school system is very segregated. Almost all the blacks go to public school. Almost all the whites go to private schools. Even though our schools were mostly black, we saw that students didn't have a sense of their own history. There are people living in this community who made significant contributions to the civil rights movement, but there are no written records and the young people didn't know about it. ROCC members came up with the idea of sponsoring an essay contest with the theme "The History of Holmes County from a Black Perspective." The kids interview people from the community. Each year the specific topic differs, but still with the black history focus. Some of the topics have been "Life on the Plantation," "Holmes County Politics, Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow" and "Black-Owned Land."

To show you what a powerful tool this can be, let me tell you about the 1984 topic. Schools built for black communities were called Attendance Centers for Negroes, then later, Attendance Centers. ROCC's essay contest topic encouraged students to find out more about how that name came to be. As the students talked to folks in the community, it seemed that everyone wanted it changed. It sounded like you had graduated from a correctional institution. The community wanted to change the names of the schools to the names of the first principals of each school, who were all black. The Board rejected the request. The kids got petitions signed and made the request again. The School Board said they didn't see any white folks' names on the petitions and they pay taxes too. But they don't send their kids to the school. The Board then took it "under advisement" — the Board and their lawyers kept throwing up roadblocks.

The effort was growing and included students, parents and community. The Board had a special meeting and still refused to change the names. The people said they wouldn't leave until the name got changed. We had already called in the media and blocked the doors. The Board went in the back room, came out just a few minutes later and said the names would be changed. ROCC then did a debriefing and we asked ourselves "Was that a victory?" We felt that it was good that the change was made, but the real victory was the power that the people felt.

Later we added a poster contest so younger children could work on the same themes. We have Cultural Celebrations each year and have an award ceremony in which lots of kids participate. We have a summer program in which groups of youth work together to produce Bloodlines, a student-written magazine that centers on culture and history and incorporates interviewing, research and documentation. And these children who work so hard and who produce a publication that the whole community is proud of are not necessarily the best students. So it's very good for them, the organization and the community. ROCC helped institute a semester of Minority Studies at a high school, and the kids there produced a videotape that focused on local history.

This hasn't been easy. It's hard work! Sometimes progress is slow. But we've got a healthy organization filled with skilled and active people, a successful essay/poster contest with participation that grows every year, a good track record with Bloodlines, we're moving toward more Minority Studies courses in the schools. I don't mean everything's alright. But in some places some people understand what we're trying to do.

Anne Brown
Rural Organizing Cultural Center
Lexington, Mississippi

[In my vision] I'd want to think about education in another way, other than just in those buildings, so that it serves us and our families and our communities all the time and is not limited to when we go into that particular space. And I like to think of it as a process from the beginning of life to the very end of life, not some period of time we put in.

Linda Martin
Burton, West Virginia

SORTING AND SCREENING

More than twenty-five years after Brown v. Board of Education, color-blind and class-blind education still is not a reality for American students. Office of Civil Rights statistics describe the same story that students, parents and other education activists tell. Schooling is used to sort and screen along economic and racial lines: poor children and children of color are often tracked into lower level classes; discipline policies are often applied differently; private schools are used to continue segregation.

> *I think the school system is functioning very well. Its intent is to exclude certain children and to determine from the time the child enters kindergarten where they can keep the child for the rest of his life. There have always been a few of different classes and colors to make it through, but really the intent of school is to train children to stay in their places ... our economy determines what our school system produces. Our school system trains us to fit into economic slots.*
>
> Linda Martin
> Burton, West Virginia

LABELING AND TRACKING

Research supports parents' claims that labeling and tracking practices are widespread and harmful. In *Keeping Track*, educational researcher Jeannie Oakes (1985) writes that poor children and children of color have been hurt the most by tracking: "If schooling is intended to provide access to economic, political and social opportunity for those who are so often denied such access, school tracking appears to interfere seriously with this goal" (p. 191). Oakes further argues that tracking re-segregates students in desegregated schools, and that students in lower-track classes receive less instruction, instruction of poorer quality, and spend more time on routine, non-learning tasks. The cumulative academic and social effects of this are devastating.

In many areas, differential treatment based on class and race is often practice, not policy, yet results are the same. National attention has recently been focused on Selma, Alabama, where citizens have organized school boycotts around these issues.

> *I started going to B.E.S.T. meetings and became chair. I worked to become more knowledgeable of what was happening in our schools. Seventy percent of the students in our system are black. The School Board made many things racial. If kids came from a poor area, they put them in Level 3 (the lowest level). But just because the families are poor, doesn't mean the kids are dumb!*
>
> Alice Boynton
> B.E.S.T. (Best Educational Support Team)
> Selma, Alabama

> *It's racial tracking that's going on in Selma. There were approximately 3% blacks in the first, highest level; 47% in the middle level; and 50% in the lowest level. We found that students who did well on grade point averages and standardized tests were still placed in lower levels. The tracking system was especially bad because those in the lower level, and some in the middle level, were not allowed to take basic high school classes, like algebra, biology, chemistry and foreign languages. So about 50% of black students for 20 years were tracked into unskilled labor jobs. And it wasn't based on objective criteria. Dr. Roussell came in [as School Superintendent] and attempted to change that system. There's plain, deep-seated racism as a guiding force in Selma schools ... The predominately white school board, which is appointed by the City Council, which is also white, attempted to fire Roussell after he tried to change the tracking system—after he tried to institute some objective criteria in it. Immediately after that, at least one of the School Board members switched their children to a private, segregated school. So they had a segregated school system, there was integration only in sports and band, not really in the classes. Those students in level 1 were getting a good education, but not the rest.*
>
> Connie Tucker
> B.E.S.T.
> Selma, Alabama

The problem of African-American and poor kids being tracked into lower levels is not unique to Selma. Tracking may be as informal as a classroom teacher deciding in which reading group to place a child. It may be more far-reaching and include constituting whole classes as "high groups" or "low groups." In high school it may consist of "college bound" tracks and "vocational" tracks. These tracking placements are often done easily and informally, without parent input and sometimes with no "objective" criteria. Unfortunately, the problem is hard to document on a state or national level since there are no federally-collected statistics on tracking.

However, we do have national statistics on children identified as Learning Disabled, Seriously Emotionally Disturbed, Trainable Mentally Retarded, or Educable Mentally Retarded, and Gifted and Talented. These statistics show how many white, African-American and Latino children carry those labels, and how their proportions compare to those of each group in the school population.

These "special needs" labels are often thought of as less arbitrary than tracking, partially because they require certification by a school psychologist. However, parents and teachers point out that certification often seems to have little to do with how the child functions in the classroom and in the community; that the criteria for certification are in constant change, often because of funding problems; and that understanding and implementation of certification procedures varies substantially from one area to another.

Generally, the category Trainable Mentally Retarded (TMR) refers to students who are seriously disabled and whose academic potential is thought to be very slight; Educable Mentally Retarded (EMR) refers to children whose academic potential is thought to be higher. Both these groups of children are generally educated in special classes or special centers. Children who have been labeled as having Specific Learning Disabilities (SLD) or being Seriously Emotionally Disturbed (SED) are understood to have learning problems not necessarily related to intelligence but to other social or biological factors; these children may or may not be in special classes. The Learning Disabled label is often felt to be more socially acceptable than the others, indeed sometimes it is even sought by parents, since the labels carry with them additional parental rights in decision-making.

The National Coalition of Advocates for Students (NCAS) analyzed Office of Civil Rights (OCR) data derived from self-reporting of about 20% of the country's school systems. The NCAS 1986 analysis of OCR data shows that, nationally, African-American children are consistently over-represented in several categories:

* Nationally, while 16% of school-age children are African-American, they make up 27% of those identified as Educable Mentally Retarded (EMR), and 35% of those identified as Trainable Mentally Retarded (TMR).

* The difference between white and African-American rates disappears in the more "acceptable" category of Specific Learning Disability (SLD); 17% are African-American; 71% are white, about their proportion in the total population.

* The difference in African-American and white rates appears again among the children identified as Seriously Emotionally Disturbed (SED). Sixteen percent of school children are African-American, yet they make up 27% of all children labeled as disturbed; white children make up 70% of the school population, but 65% of those labeled as SED.

* The group of children identified as gifted and talented has only half of the expected number of African-Americans (only 8%).

As the charts show, some states are worse than others when it comes to over-identifying black students in special needs categories:

* Alabama's African-American children make up 37% of the school population, yet 65% of those identified as Educable Mentally Retarded, and 57% of those identified as TMR.

* Twenty-four percent of Arkansas schoolchildren are African-American, but they are identified as EMR at more than twice that rate — 52%.

* African-Americans are also identified as EMR at more than twice the expected rate in North Carolina (29% of the total enrollment, but 60% of the identified EMR).

* In South Carolina, African-American students make up 44% of the school population, but 78% of the group identified as EMR.

* Kentucky's African-American students are only 10% of the state's school population, yet they are 20% of those identified as SLD, and 36% of those identified as SED.

The problem of over-identifying African-American students as "special needs" children is not confined to the South. In Wisconsin, African-American students are identified as TMR at three times the rate expected from enrollment. Nevada's African-American school children are identified as learning disabled at twice the rate of enrollment. In both Minnesota and New York, African-American children are identified as Seriously Emotionally Disturbed at three times the rate expected from enrollment.

LARGEST DIFFERENCES BETWEEN AFRICAN-AMERICAN AND WHITE "SPECIAL NEEDS" RATES: TOP FIVE STATES *

CHART 1. EDUCABLE MENTALLY RETARDED (EMR)

STATE	% AFRICAN-AMERICAN ENROLLED	% EMR AND AFRICAN-AMERICAN
1. ALABAMA	37	65
2. ARKANSAS	24	52
3. SOUTH CAROLINA	44	78
4. NORTH CAROLINA	29	60
5. MICHIGAN	20	50

CHART 2. TRAINABLE MENTALLY RETARDED (TMR)

STATE	% AFRICAN-AMERICAN ENROLLED	% TMR AND AFRICAN-AMERICAN
1. WISCONSIN	9	26
2. ALABAMA	37	57
3. TENNESSEE	23	39
4. MICHIGAN	20	41
5. INDIANA	9	18

CHART 3. SPECIFIC LEARNING DISABILITY (SLD)

STATE	% AFRICAN-AMERICAN ENROLLED	% SLD AND AFRICAN-AMERICAN
1. NEVADA	10	20
2. DELAWARE	28	41
3. MARYLAND	35	49
4. KENTUCKY	10	20
5. OKLAHOMA	8	11

CHART 4. SERIOUSLY EMOTIONALLY DISTURBED (SED)

STATE	% AFRICAN-AMERICAN ENROLLED	% SED AND AFRICAN-AMERICAN
1. NEW YORK	17	53
2. DELAWARE	28	48
3. MISSOURI	15	34
4. CONNECTICUT	12	22
5. KENTUCKY	10	36

* Where African-American students are over 5% of total enrollment

Source: National Coalition of Advocates for Students (1986)

Few school administrators would openly disagree that human intelligence is randomly distributed across races, yet these numbers are so disparate that something else appears to be going on. That "something else," parents and other activists argue, is institutionally-supported racial and cultural bias. These national figures give credence to parents who charge that racism is alive and well in American schools and is evidenced by the differential treatment that children receive, including placement in lower levels and special classes.

Parents and other activists expressed their pain and anger when confronting the sorting and screening function of schools, and the ways in which schools perpetuate inequalities:

> *There is a need in Mississippi to deal with racism. Kids are failing, and adults and teachers are afraid to deal with black kids. We see no progress because we cannot deal with each other's culture. Teachers make judgements based on kids coming from housing projects or the parents' occupations — if they work at the sewing factory. White people are afraid to touch black. More money to the schools won't solve the problem until the community deals with racism ... we would need to tear down the whole system to fix it.*
>
> Betty Ewing
> Gulf Coast Tenants Association
> Gulfport, Mississippi

Federal statistics leave out tracking on the basis of class — an important issue regularly confronted by workshop participants — because information on how family income affects class placement, or identification as "special needs" students, is not readily available. Nevertheless, parents feel strongly that class as well as race is often the basis for differential treatment of children.

SEGREGATION AND PRIVATE SCHOOLS

During the past two decades, we have witnessed the creation of "dual school systems," especially in the rural South. As it became harder to get around integration laws in the 1960's and 1970's, private schools were established as a means of continuing segregation, especially for the elite class of whites. The schools flourished, even in areas where there was no strong tradition of parochial/private school attendance. However, wealthy whites continue to dominate local power structures, including county and city government and school boards. They make decisions on school issues and wield political power on funding and other concerns, yet often send their children to private schools. They may have more interest in keeping tax rates low than in improving the quality of schools that serve poor whites and people of color.

As part of our work for the Highlander Rural Education project, the Center for Literacy Studies completed some statistical research on variables relating to education in 13 counties. The counties, located in 12 different states, were chosen because these communities were organizing around educational issues. These communities were not the "worst" or "best;" as far as we know they are typical of other areas within these states. (See Appendix A for sample *Community Profile*) In five of the nine counties which had a significant non-white population, 10% or more of the white children attended private schools. In Jasper County, South Carolina, 35% of white elementary school students attend private school. In Phillips County, Arkansas, 18% of white high school students attend private school. Seventeen percent of white high schoolers in Haywood County, Tennessee, attend private school.

However, aggregate statistics can easily mask problems to outside observers. In Holmes County, Mississippi, census data shows 38% of white elementary and high school students attend private schools. Yet in the town of Durant in Holmes County, practically 100% of the school population is African-American, although certainly the town population is not. The Durant example suggests the difficulties in documenting the extent of segregation in the form of private schools.

SCHOOL DISCIPLINE POLICIES

Two issues are at the heart of parental concern about school discipline policies: the kind and extent of discipline, and fairness of its application. Parents and other activists, as well as "experts" from the religious community, child development and education fields have recognized that children treated in humane, consistent ways will likely grow into competent, caring adults. Parents are questioning if children are being treated in these ways in school. Just as importantly, parents want assurances that discipline is being applied fairly, and not according to judgements about the color of a child's skin or her economic class.

Contrary to some accounts, in most instances parents have not called for less discipline. In fact, parents express diverse opinions on the issue of corporal punishment in school. However, parents and other activists speak in one voice concerning the need for sensible and fair discipline, with remedies that get to the root of problems and do not just address the symptoms.

Some people, especially those working within schools and within service delivery systems, express the view that families are sometimes abusive and, therefore, schools should be a haven for children who are being raised in unhealthy, dysfunctional environments. They argue that especially for these children, schools need to be safe, caring places which help children grow as thinkers and as whole human beings.

Robeson County, North Carolina is a tri-cultural community with significant African-American, white and Native American populations. The community has experienced many of the problems associated with poverty: low educational levels, unmet physical and social needs.

> *How do you teach an emotionally or physically abused child? We've got to deal with what happens to kids before they get to school. Teachers try to treat children alike, but don't consider the dehumanization that happens to some children everyday. Schools and teachers are turning a deaf ear. There's no way to deal with it. The education system should empower itself with authority to do something.*
>
> Kayron Maynor
> Robeson County, North Carolina

Another workshop participant, a school principal, expressed a similar thought:

> *Many families are dysfunctional—fragmented, abusive, lots of drug and alcohol use. We have lots of cases of fetal alcohol syndrome showing up, and that's not just in big cities. We need to be paying more attention to that, but we have no way to deal with it. School shouldn't be just preparation for a job but also to learn to be happy, fulfilled.*
>
> Christina Johnston
> Worcester, Vermont

Suspensions

Children with behavior problems linked with family backgrounds are too often the ones who also receive a disproportionate share of the discipline in schools. Parents often see the use of suspension from school as a particularly ineffective way to deal with school problems. They point out that suspending a child because he or she has attendance or behavior problems creates educational failures.

> *Last week we had 20 kids from the third, fourth and fifth grades kicked out of school for the rest of the year ... and they're in the streets.*
>
> Mary Shipp
> Save The Children
> Sylvester, Georgia

In many communities there is no alternative program, or a very inadequate one, set up for suspended students; as a result students' existing problems are made worse. Approaching discipline with a "revenge" mentality is exactly what students *don't* need, parents say.

> *When a student is suspended for 10 days, it is real hard, almost impossible, to pass that 9 week grading period. It's policy versus practice again. If it is policy, it may need to be changed.*
>
> Anne Brown
> Rural Organizing and Cultural Center
> Lexington, Mississippi

In the 1985-86 school year, almost 2 million of our 41 million school children in this country were suspended at least once. There are broad differences among states and among local districts in use of suspension (NCAS, 1986).

* Maryland has the highest suspension rate: over 8% of its students were suspended at least once in 1986.

* The top 5 districts sampled nationally suspended a third or more of their students at least once in 1986.

* The Proviso TWP High School District 209 in Maywood, Illinois, suspended almost half of its students at least once.

* The Penn Hills school district in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, suspended 48% of its students at least once during the year 1985-86.

These rates do represent the extremes of use of suspension, but the examples are numerous and diverse enough to suggest that the use of suspension needs to be examined. It is widely thought to be ineffective either in preventing inappropriate behavior or in addressing root causes of problem behavior. Although diverse opinions are expressed on questions about what would be appropriate discipline in schools, a unifying complaint from parents and communities concerns lack of fairness. The enforcement of discipline codes varies according to who you are, parents say.

> *It's the old boy system — blacks do not have the right to challenge whites. If you do, you have a behavior problem. If more than three black kids are in a group, that's a gang. If they're white, they're socializing. The policies are enforced with some kids, others not. For things to change, the administration has to be dealt with and the school board, too, which is all white. How much do you have to take until someone takes action? After seeing the cruelty of the school system, our job is to learn how to organize and make changes. The whole thing needs to be denounced.*
>
> Betty Ewing
> Gulf Coast Tenants Association
> Gulfport, Mississippi

Statistics from the Office of Civil Rights back up parents' claims of unfairness. Nationally, African-Americans account for 16% of our school population but receive 30% of suspensions (NCAS, 1986). As in other measures, the differences in rates of African-American suspensions and white suspensions shows great variability among states and individual districts.

* In the top five states — Ohio, Minnesota, Pennsylvania, Missouri and Wisconsin — the African-American suspension rate was more than 3 times the white suspension rate in 1985-6.

* In Park Ridge, Illinois, the Maine Township High School District 207 does not have one of the highest overall suspension rates; but 61% of their African-American students were suspended at least once, while "only" 10% of white students were suspended during the year.

* In the Penn Hills District in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, 70% of the African-American students were suspended at least once during the year, along with 42% of white students.

This suspension data is incomplete, since the length of the suspension (which can range from one day to many) is not addressed. Expulsion - the permanent or long-term removal of a student from a school - is not documented at all.

Corporal Punishment

The effectiveness of corporal punishment as a means of discipline has also been questioned. In surveys of research on corporal punishment practices, the National Parent Teacher Association (1990) finds that "instead of curbing violence, corporal punishment teaches children to use violence to solve problems" (p.40). Even parents who do not condemn all use of corporal punishment have been surprised and disturbed about the extent of its use. Nationally, over a million children received corporal punishment at least once during the 1985-86 school year, according to Office of Civil Rights reports (NCAS, 1986). Again, there are large differences among states and among local school districts in use of corporal punishment.

* Almost 14% of Arkansas school children, and 10% of Mississippi school children received corporal punishment at least once during the school year, while 7 states — Hawaii, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire New Jersey, Rhode Island and Vermont — reported no incidence of corporal punishment. Four years after these statistics were collected, 20 states had outlawed corporal punishment.

* There was a clear regional difference in use of corporal punishment. The top 10 ranked states in use of corporal punishment were Southern: Arkansas, Mississippi, Alabama, Tennessee, Oklahoma, Georgia, Texas, Florida, South Carolina, and Louisiana.

* Again, there were individual districts reporting disturbingly high rates of corporal punishment. Of the districts sampled nationally, top "honors" go to the Eudora Special School District in Eudora, Arkansas, where more than 62% of school children received corporal punishment at least once during the year.

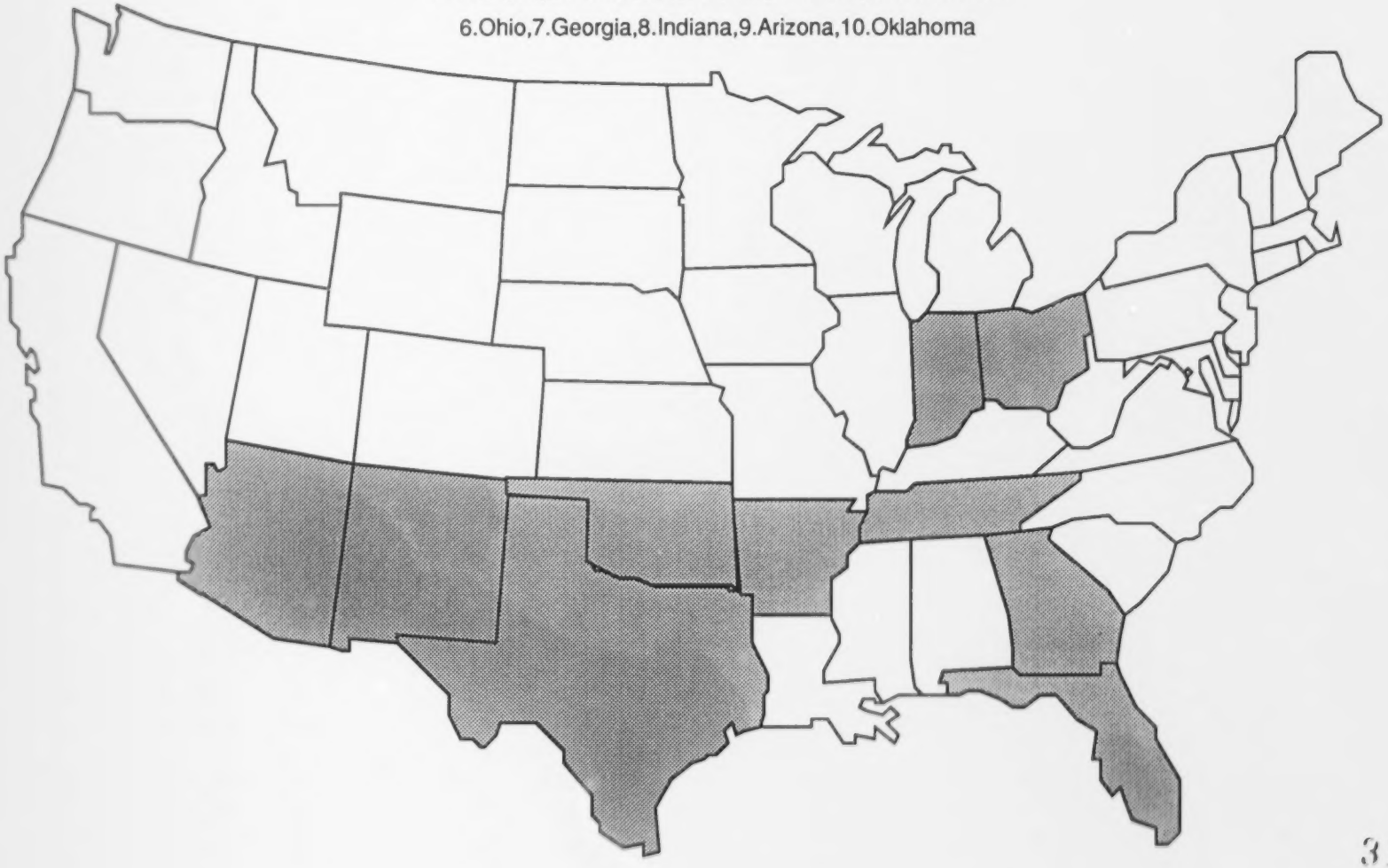
* In Strong, Arkansas, 49% of the school children received corporal punishment at least once, while 46% of the children of Bacon County School District in Alma, Georgia, were punished at least once in that way during the year.

The same patterns of over-representation of African-American students, as well as much variation among states and districts, holds as true for corporal punishment rates as for suspension rates. Nationally, African-American students make up 16% of the school population, but receive 31% of the corporal punishment in schools each year. Just as the South clearly was higher in overall corporal punishment rates, the region also had the greatest difference between African-American and white corporal punishment rates (see map).

* Corporal punishment rates for African-American students were almost twice those for whites in Arkansas, Tennessee, Texas, Florida, New Mexico and Ohio.

Marked states indicate Largest Difference Between
African American and White Corporal Punishment Rates
Top Ten States:

1.Arkansas,2.Tennessee,3.Texas,4.Florida,5.New Mexico
6.Ohio,7.Georgia,8.Indiana,9.Arizona,10.Oklahoma



In individual school districts, the differences in rates were astounding. Of the twenty districts with the highest overall corporal punishment rates, six also had large differences between African-American and white rates:

* In the Eudora Special School District in Arkansas, 67% of the African-American students received corporal punishment at least once in 1985-86, while 31% of the white students were punished in that way.

* In the Brenham Independent School District in Texas, 55% of the African-American students received corporal punishment, compared with 24% of the white students.

* In the Bacon County School District in Alma, Georgia, 66% of the African-American students received corporal punishment along with 40% of the white students.

In some school districts, although overall corporal punishment rates were relatively low, African-American students were at much greater risk of receiving corporal punishment than whites.

* In Maryville City Schools in Maryville, Tennessee, where the overall corporal punishment rate is 7%, 50% of African-American students received corporal punishment.

Although the overall rate for corporal punishment of Latino children is not higher than the percentage of Latino students nationally, some states and districts are clearly a problem.

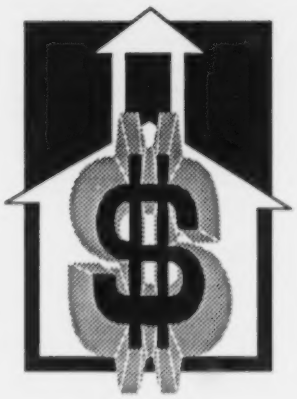
* In Arizona, Kansas, Ohio, Washington and Idaho, Latino students received corporal punishment at around twice the rate of white children.

* In the Fort Bend Independent School District in Sugarland, Texas, Latino children were punished corporally twice as much as white children — 17% for Latinos versus 9% for whites.

* In the Pasco County School District in Land O Lakes, Florida, 17% of Latino students received corporal punishment, while 10% of white students were punished in that way during the 1985-86 school year.

Despite continuing community protest and professional criticism, schools continue their sorting and screening functions. Clearly, African-American students are often over-identified in "special needs" populations. While tracking statistics per se are hard to come by, the experience of people in communities indicates that many formal and informal tracking systems are still in place. African-American children are more at risk than whites for corporal punishment or suspension. And in many communities, segregation continues in the guise of private schools. Schools reflect, and sometimes concentrate, the problems we have in our society. Our inability to make significant progress in confronting racism and classism is reflected in these educational concerns.

YOU GET WHAT YOU PAY FOR: FINANCING SCHOOLS



Money makes a difference in all education, but rural school systems have especially acute funding problems. It would cost more to operate a rural school than an urban one, if the same facilities and educational options were provided. An Organization for Economic and Community Development (OECD) study of schools in its 24 member nations showed that "the costs of delivering needed educational services in sparsely populated areas are inherently and inevitably higher than the costs of providing the same services in more densely populated areas" (Sher, 1983, p.259).

Although rural schools should be more expensive to operate, they consistently receive less funding than urban and suburban ones. Quality of education suffers. School finance is an important issue for rural communities, although it is complex and difficult for community groups and parents to address. Some key issues are:

* Funding is unequally distributed between rural and urban districts;
* Attempts at reform are often feared to increase outside control over local school districts;
* Attempts at reform are often linked with consolidation of schools and districts, on the grounds that larger is better, or more cost effective.

DISPARITY BETWEEN RURAL AND SUBURBAN FUNDING

An *Alabama Journal* series on education problems in Alabama contrasts the schools of rural Wilcox County with those of Mountain Brook, an affluent city near Birmingham.

> Mountain Brook schools offer computer courses, art, and a range of foreign languages and special classes. Many Wilcox County students do well to have textbooks of their own. (*Southern Exposure*, 1989, p. 15)

The problem is that Wilcox County does not generate the property tax revenues of its neighbors. In Wilcox County, 10 percent of the landowners control 71 percent of the land. Most of the wealth comes from timbering, but timber land is taxed at only 59 cents an acre, a negligible sum. Wilcox County is in the classic dilemma of many rural counties, in which the wealth of

revenues. Even if residents in rural counties make a serious commitment to education, and tax themselves at a higher rate than urban residents, tax revenues would still be lower because there are fewer property owners, and rural property has lower value. Striking disparities often exist among funding levels of school systems in different school systems. In a report for Congress, the Congressional Research Service (1990) reviewed Census data on expenditures by all Local Education Authorities (LEAs) for the 1986-87 school year. These figures reflect total current expenditures per pupil from *all* sources, including local, state and federal governments. The highest spending LEA often invests thousands of dollars more per pupil than the lowest spending LEA in the same state.

In Kentucky, for example, rural Greenup County spent $1,762 per pupil, while Frankfort, the state capital, spent $4,053 for each of its pupils. In Arkansas the range from lowest to highest stretched from $1,844 to $5,155. In Tennessee, tiny Alamo Town elementary school district in rural Crockett County spent $1,555 per pupil, while affluent, urban Oak Ridge spent $3,676. It is perhaps most discouraging that most school systems in the South spend less than the national average on education.

> *In Eastern Kentucky we didn't have as much money for schools as the richer counties did. We haven't had any art or music teachers in our K-8th grade. We have kids who never had a single art or music teacher in their first nine years, then have only one art teacher for 1000 kids in high school. We have one counselor in our county who has to deal with over 2000 school children. But in some school districts, they have a counselor for every school. They have an art teacher and a music teacher in every school.*
>
> Judy Martin
> Appalachian Communities for Children
> McKee, Kentucky

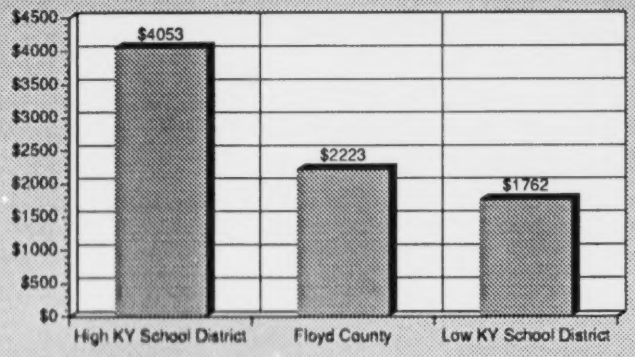
As long as school funding is based primarily on property and local sales taxes, less affluent rural areas will inevitably receive lower funding than more affluent urban, and especially suburban ones. Property tax revenues are lower in rural areas because there are fewer people; property has lower value; and most agricultural and timber land is taxed at lower rates. Because retail centers are urban, rural residents spend their sales taxes supporting urban school districts rather than their own schools.

As long as state and federal funds designed to supplement local funds are allocated on a per capita basis, sparsely populated rural areas will not receive enough extra help to equalize their resources. Jonathan Sher (1987) gives us an example:

> Imagine there is a per capita allocation from the legislature through which every student is going to get $10.00 for program "X." In a city with 100,000 students enrolled, that means the school system is going to receive $1 million to implement its program. Even in today's economy, $1 million is a significant sum of money with which to operate an educational program. Think, however, of the rural school system with only 100 kids enrolled. They're only going to get $1,000 — a sum too small to hire anyone or to effectively implement program X ... The per capita funding bias in federal and state funding formulae means that rural school systems rarely even get the "critical mass" of funding necessary to take effective action. (p.32)

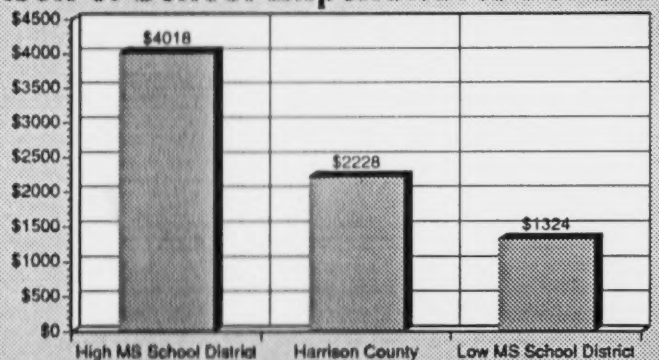
As long as there is no minimum funding level, a safety net through which no system is allowed to fall, rural systems will struggle to gain enough resources to provide even a basic quality education for all children.

FLOYD COUNTY KENTUCKY
Comparison of School Expenditures Per Student (1986-87)



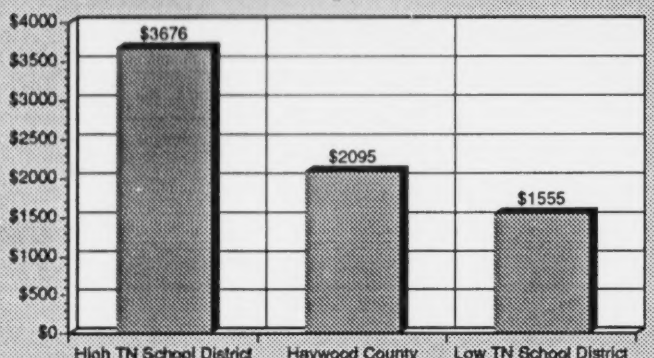
Source: U.S. Census

HARRISON COUNTY, MISSISSIPPI
Comparison of School Expenditures Per Student (1986-87)



Source: U.S. Census

HAYWOODCOUNTY, TENNESSEE
Comparison of School Expenditures Per Student (1986-87)



Source: U.S. Census

Political issues complicate school financing, as they do other educational issues. The Wilcox County, Alabama Schools Superintendent feels that the problems of her poor and under- funded school system are connected with "a divided community where most people with political power and financial means care little about public schools. Most whites send their children to private schools: 'White flight' after integration of the 1980's left the public schools without funding or community support" (*Southern Exposure*, 1989, p. 18).

In regions with a substantial population of color, white flight to private school systems may exacerbate financial issues. In such counties, since many of the middle class white families do not use the public schools, they give little support for increasing local taxes to finance them. In other counties the issue is unequal allocation of funds between the most rural schools and the small town schools where middle class families send their children.

The plight of rural schools has reached a crisis point in the last few years. In county after county in Tennessee, schools have opened late, closed early, or discontinued transportation services because of lack of funding. Voices demanding reform of school financing, and greater equality of rural and urban funding, are being raised in many states.

> *How do we fund schools? We're experiencing a taxpayers' revolt. That's the same community that is demanding better schools but they don't want to bear the burden — and there are good reasons for that. How do we raise the revenues? Give bake sales? And the S&Ls just got $600 billion. We can all be concerned about children and quality of education and preserving culture, but the fact is that it is a very expensive operation and we've got to pay attention to how we're going to get the money — from whose pocketbook?*
>
> John Bloch
> Littleton, New Hampshire

EDUCATIONAL REFORM

Educational reform, including financing, has been a hot issue in recent years in a number of states. In Tennessee, nearly half of the state's 140 school districts have joined in a lawsuit against the state, alleging that local option sales taxes allow considerably more money to flow to urban schools. They hope to remedy a funding structure in which a number of rural systems find themselves unable to open schools on time, or keep their buses running for an entire year.

However, the reform attempts do not always meet the approval of parents and community members. Rachel Tompkins (1977), associate director of the Citizens' Council for Ohio Schools, reviewed the history of school financing and the problems of inequities between rural and urban districts. She argued that additional funding from the state is the only viable solution. She noted that many involved in rural education resist an increased funding role for the state because of fears that it would be accompanied by increased state control. Rural districts like to retain their independence. Kentucky's educational and tax reform package, designed under pressure from the state Supreme Court to address the inequities of rural and urban funding, tries to address both the issue of control and of funding (see box, p.31).

In Kentucky, a 1989 Supreme Court decision declared the entire system of elementary and secondary education in the state unconstitutional. The Court addressed a complex mass of educational problems, including inequities of funding between school districts, general under-funding of schools and under-

collection of property taxes, as well as curriculum and governance inadequacies. In response, the state General Assembly set up task forces to address curriculum, governance and financing of Kentucky schools, and developed comprehensive education and tax reform legislation, enacted in 1990. This increases revenues from taxes for Kentucky school systems, and guarantees a base funding of $2,305 per student for 1990 and $2,420 in 1991-92. Additions to the base are made for the costs of educating at-risk children and exceptional children, and for transportation costs in the school district. A minimum level of local funding for schools is required, and property-poor counties can gain additional state support if they go beyond the minimum tax rate (Kentucky Legislative Research Commission, 1990).

Along with the funding reforms, goes a gradual conversion to a system of "site-based management," in which local administrators, teachers and parents are given greater share in local decisions. However, the state's ability to intervene in local schools is strengthened through a system of rewards for schools that perform well and sanctions for those that fail to meet state-set standards. Successful schools will earn greater independence; schools that fail will have more intervention, but also more state assistance. Other elements of the plan are statewide preschool; elimination of early grade levels to reduce the stigma of failure at an early age; and broad measures aimed at eliminating corruption in local schools.

Tompkins (1977) argues that the only feasible way to address rural-urban funding inequities is through an increased role of the state — but that this increased funding role should not be associated with increased state control of educational systems. In fact, she argues, existing "local control" of school districts is not very effective if resources are not plentiful enough to provide real choices. "Those in rural areas who are concerned about local control should focus on reshaping the balance between education professionals and citizens in their schools and districts. They will find many allies on that issue in urban and suburban districts" (p.155).

However, the experience of workshop participants from states where school finance reform has already taken place, suggest that increased funding without increased outside control is not so easy.

> *My comments are based on our experience in North Carolina where we had school reform and used a foundation plan to fund it. It was supposed to take place over eight years, and we're already broke — well, we're not really broke but we want better roads more than better schools. We changed our priorities —and what you get with the money is a lot more restrictions from the state. We've also had a Senate bill to keep more local control over the schools. But you get it if you keep your test scores up and do certain other things. I think that's going to be how things go.*
>
> Page McCullough
> Durham, North Carolina

CONSOLIDATION AND FINANCIAL REFORM

Attempts at rural school reform over the last century have usually led to consolidation of schools, on the grounds that larger not only means better education with more options for students, but also is more cost effective. There is actually little research to prove that either cheaper or better quality education results from consolidation. Arguments that consolidating small schools saves money through "economies of scale" commonly ignore the increased costs of transporting large numbers of students great distances. Sher and Tompkins (1977) review of the literature concludes that "the traditional claim that consolidating rural schools and districts will, ipso facto, save money appears to have no empirical and logical basis" (p.51).

Nor is there much evidence that higher quality education results from consolidation. Parents point to the debilitating effect on students of long bus journeys to and from school. Jeffrey Bowen, an administrator with the New York School Boards Association, says "From what we now know, it's not the size of the school but the length of the bus ride that is the biggest negative influence on a rural child's education" (*Progressive Farmer*, 1989, p. 4).

Kreitlow's longitudinal study (1962, 1966, 1971) comparing Wisconsin communities reorganized schools in the late 1940's, with other districts which did not reorganize, suggests that when IQ and parental income levels are taken into account, there is no evidence that the reorganized schools produced students with higher test scores.

An earlier educational reform package in West Virginia focused much more heavily on consolidation as a means of addressing the inequities of school funding. In the workshop, a community member complained:

> *In West Virginia, what money is there, they're spending on school buildings, and it isn't changing the quality of education for our children at all. No money is going to real changes.*
>
> Linda Martin
> Burton, West Virginia

In the workshop, community members talked about the effects of consolidation, not only on children, but also on parents and the whole community.

> *Consolidated schools are one of the biggest contributors to apathy for all of us. When you remove the school from the community, it's not accessible, and so it becomes some foreign place. Closing up small community schools, busing kids to larger schools where they are alienated and the parents never get there, are increasing problems in keeping people involved in education.*
>
> Judy Robinson
> Beckley, West Virginia

Participants felt that small schools in rural areas *can* work, and there are increasing attempts to develop innovative and cost-effective ways to increase the quality and range of the education they can offer. Distance learning via satellite, and two-way interactive TV projects for linked schools, development of pre-school and family-oriented programs to better prepare children for school and involve families in their education are all methods designed to help promote quality education in rural areas. Nevertheless, these projects still cost money, and workshop participants continue to be concerned about where the money is coming from, and how it is spent.

KENTUCKY LEGISLATIVE REFORM

In 1986, sixty-six of Kentucky's poorest school districts joined in a lawsuit which charged that the funding system for schools in the state was inequitable. The court agreed that the funding structure was not fair to all of Kentucky's school children, and that the state statutes relating to funding should be reviewed. Advisory panels were set up and hearings were held across the state. Meanwhile, the court decision was appealed by the State Legislature to the State Supreme Court. That body found that not only was funding unfair, but that the whole Kentucky school system was inadequate. Fueled by the public outcry for reform, task forces grappled with questions of quality, charges of corruption in local systems, and educational effects of community poverty. Sweeping reforms were instituted.

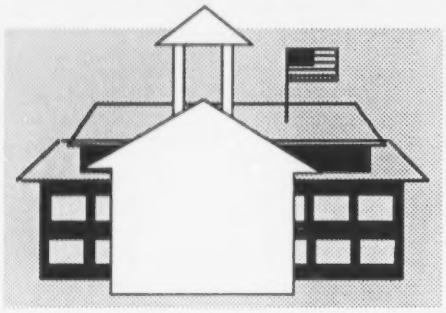
> *Kentucky's right on the verge of some real good things happening, if this new reform is managed right. Each school will have "site based management" so that decisions are made on a local level, even about curriculum, discipline, all kinds of things. The councils are made up of the principal, three teachers elected by the other teachers in that school and two parents elected from the largest parent organization, like the PTA or PTO, or some new organization founded for that purpose. Resource centers will be developed for some schools in communities that have a lot of poverty. The resource centers will help with health services, counseling, child care and other programs. Every culturally disadvantaged (poor) four-year-old must be served at school if their parents request services. There will be no tracking in first, second, third grades. Kids will all work on their own levels in one primary grade. There will be no failures. For the first time, superintendents cannot hire their relatives. Principals cannot hire their relatives. You can't be related to a school board member. If you're related and already there, you can stay, but you can't be promoted.*
>
> Judy Martin
> Appalachian Communities for Children
> McKee, Kentucky

Legislative strategists crafted the bill so that legislators would cast one vote — up or down — on the Kentucky Education Reform Act of 1990, which included both the educational reforms and the financing statutes. This move prevented the problem that so often happens as politicians vote for reforms, but don't vote the money to fund them. By early 1990, the State had developed plans for raising $1.3 billion in new revenues for education over the next two years. Kentucky joins Texas, Montana, New Jersey and West Virginia, who have had lawsuits in the past several years addressing equitable funding questions. Many believe that Kentucky's reforms are the most wide-reaching. In general, parents and activists are enthusiastic about the potential improvements generated by the new law, and know they will need to be vigilant on the local level to see that plans are carried out.

For me it is a question of ownership. I don't care how much money. I don't care how many additional teachers. I don't care how many new buildings. If you don't own it, if you don't control it, if you don't have a voice, what does it matter about all these other things? If I can't own it, then I don't want anything to do with the reform. If the reform doesn't start with giving me a voice and giving me ownership, forget it.

Jane Sapp
Springfield, Massachusetts

EDUCATION: WHO DECIDES?



In many communities, getting a say in decision-making isn't easy. School boards and other policy makers often possess political power not easily confronted by poor parents and people of color, and may be insensitive to the needs and goals of community people. Despite policy makers' frequently stated wish to "get parents involved," non-white, non-middle class parents are often not welcome partners in creating shared educational visions. Vocal communities and organizations may be shut out of public discussions of education issues in subtle and not-so-subtle ways. The difficulties inherent in consistent, long-term involvement of citizens' groups in education sometimes prevents real educational change. Effects of consolidation make it more difficult for local people to be heard, and the domination of education by "experts" means that the voices of many parents are denied validity by those in power. Parents who are poor may face many barriers to meaningful participation in the educational system.

> *We have a lot of those new jobs President Bush talks about. But they are all low level jobs. They keep people still needing assistance, still needing AFDC to live. So you build up a whole culture of lying and cheating because the people still have to have food stamps. They still have to have Medicaid. You can't make it like that. How can the parents go to school and have a conference with the teacher when they can't miss one day of work? They are working 12 hours a day, but they still can't make it ... it's like a whipped feeling. It's like swimming upstream.*
>
> Veronica Thomas
> Taxpayers Advocacy Support Coalition
> Hardeeville, South Carolina

In Selma, Alabama, parents and other concerned citizens organized school boycotts to protest the firing of African-American School Superintendent Norward Roussell by the majority-white school board. Dr. Roussell had challenged the Selma tracking system which groups students and directs them into higher-level or lower-level courses based on what many feel are arbitrary criteria. These parents focused national attention not just on the racism still prevalent in Selma, but also on the issue of community control of schools.

[May 1990 Workshop]. *When they tried to fire Roussell, there was a community outcry and a movement was born. The issue is not just tracking, but of community control. We have 80% of the student body unrepresented, essentially unheard. Our ability to dismantle tracking is directly related to representative government. It's been an ongoing struggle. When we say "movement" we really mean movement in the sense of the 60's — a lot of creative direct actions. It's been very dramatic. Leaders are being arrested — us, and ministers, and deans and directors of youth services, community activists. The authorities are using J. Edgar Hoover tactics — arrest, intimidation, investigations, going after people's jobs. This young man here was beaten in the streets the day I was arrested. We are committed to changing the School Board and changing Selma so we won't have to go through this struggle 25 years from now.*

[September 1990 Interview]. *We have come to an agreement with the City Council and the School Board now, but that doesn't mean everything is fixed. Our work has really just begun. We have two immediate goals. One concerns students who are products of the tracking system. They are unprepared to deal with basic high school subjects because they don't have the academic background. They were tracked into lower level classes and now have to compete as if they had worked on a higher level all these years. They need tutoring and help to succeed. The other goal has to do with the younger kids and their parents. We need to set up mentoring for them so that they have the information and are prepared to deal with the school system. For example, many parents didn't know that it's actually better for their kids to bring home a 'C' in regular coursework than an 'A' in lower level work. The work we need to do is just overwhelming. There's a generation of people who are unprepared to survive. Our children are in crisis.*

Connie Tucker
BEST, Selma, Alabama

School consolidation is another barrier to local control, and the communities most at risk for consolidation are also often in the least powerful positions to fight it. Often the rhetoric heard on consolidation issues concerns "economics of scale," efficiency, quality and curricular offerings, but those may not be the genuine concerns. The real issues are likely to be class and race in the Deep South, and community control in Appalachia.

We need to put into the public debate the things that are good about rural schools and turn away from the notion that big schools are better. In my lifetime, I've seen it go from one room schools to four room schools to one high school per county. The kids who are left out are the poor kids. People in these communities don't have the political muscle to keep community schools.

Beth Spence
Lincoln County, West Virginia

Consolidation not only lessens the chances of real community input in decision making, it also makes more unlikely substantial parental involvement in schools. Buildings don't "make" a school. Students and teachers and community make a school. Large, imposing structures may be counterproductive to the open and caring atmosphere parents want their children, and themselves, to encounter at school.

Rural citizens may be asked to choose between local control and "quality" education. In Dunne's (1983) example of two schools in Hawkins County, Tennessee, parents fought to keep the community school at Clinch, despite an inadequate building, an extremely limited curriculum, a reputation of being the dumping ground for less capable teachers, *and* the availability of a beautiful, well-equipped high school "over the mountain" in Rogersville. Dunne's analysis is that in Clinch, as in other places all across the country, parents prefer the certainty that they can have some influence in creating and maintaining a school which is consistent with their values and goals to sending their children to an uncertain, "expert" dominated, but perhaps higher quality school, as measured by conventional standards.

> The residents of Clinch know that most of their children will work in the factories of Rogersville, no matter what kind of schooling they have. Given that outcome, it may be quite reasonable to decide to keep a school — even a decrepit school — in which Clinch children are not considered "hicks," a school in which everyone understands that transplanting tobacco seedlings is more important than a day or two of classes. We might well ask why the school in Clinch should have so little, when the school in Rogersville has so much. But we run a serious risk when we begin to ask whether the citizens of Clinch have a right to decide whether their school should continue to exist. (p. 256)

Dunne (1977), Sher (1981) and others, including countless parents, argue that many of the best things about rural schools can't be quantified. In the rush to prove that rural schools are defective and must be abandoned quickly, these positive factors are lost to public discussion. They point to the cohesiveness of small groups, greater community and family participation in schools, less alienation from the education process. Dunne (1983) argues that, ultimately, local control may matter most to rural communities.

TAKING BACK CONTROL: EDUCATION IN CHEROKEE

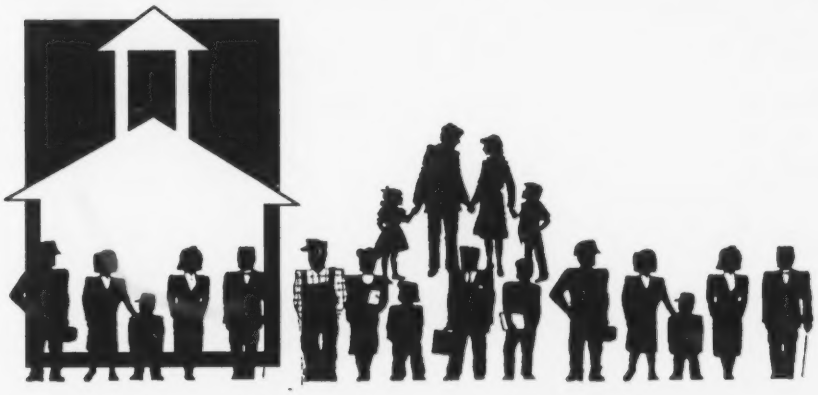
Perhaps one of the most compelling examples of loss of local control are schools on Native American reservations. Historically, these schools have been under the control of the Federal government, whose "rule from afar" has met with community dissatisfaction and resistance. In Cherokee, North Carolina, some parents were sending their children off the reservation to public schools in neighboring communities. The local school board of Cherokee, elected by members of the Eastern Band of the Cherokee, learned that the Choctaw Nation in Mississippi had regained control of their reservation schools. School board members talked with other community residents and visited the Choctaw schools. After much work and planning, the Cherokee nation petitioned for and received full control of their schools. A teacher from the Cherokee reservation speaks:

> *How would you like to have your budget come from Congress? Native Americans getting their education from the Federal government brings a lot of strange things with it, especially in terms of governing from a distance and the bureaucrats being removed from the victims. The Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) decides for the Cherokee school system what is an adequate amount of money. It's based on the Washington politicians' ideas on what is needed in Cherokee, North Carolina. And this question of ownership ... the further away from the source of accountability you get, the fuzzier these issues become. Our principals are appointed in Washington. They are Federal employees who are transferred to this community. There are situations that are real strange. We have been functioning under this system and it represents inequity. The Cherokee school system is right now undergoing monumental change. Beginning in August, 1990, we will be administering our own school system instead of the BIA.*
>
> *The tribal council will now be accountable. The Eastern band of the Cherokee nation is a sovereign country and it's operated by tribal government. The school board is elected. The tribe will be receiving the grant to run the schools. I wanted you all to be aware that this great experiment is underway that will have ramifications not only for the Eastern band of the Cherokee who have been receiving the message that we can't run our own school system, and that we aren't smart enough ourselves to figure out how to do it. There's a lot of power and enablement involved in this effort. I'm sure there's going to be growing pains involved in this effort — there always are. In your prayers for all the children, keep in mind there's something going on here.*
>
> Carolyn Murdock
> Cherokee Challenge
> Cherokee, North Carolina

[In our vision] We have a different way of thinking about what education is. It's not just something that you learn within the school that somebody else tells you is important, but it's how you lead your life, what's happening in your community, justice issues, what's going on around you. It's not just learning to do certain things and getting graded on it.

Judy Martin
Appalachian Communities for Children
McKee, Kentucky

COLLECTIVE SOLUTIONS: RURAL COMMUNITIES ORGANIZE FOR CHANGE



conveying skills and information. They may doubt whether education has nurtured a sense of values, cultural pride, acceptance of diversity, critical thinking, or practical intelligence. They acknowledge the rural problems of an especially acute scarcity of resources, trends that favor closing small schools. They have the uneasy realization that providing their children a good education may mean young people will leave for the cities. But parents and other rural activists are at work on solutions, on making their visions for education come true in their communities.

The ways that people have chosen to work on these problems embrace a range of activities. Some communities, like Selma (page 33-34), have used direct action to focus attention on problems. Others have chosen to work closely with school systems to provide a model for doing things differently, such as Appalachian Communities for Children in McKee, Kentucky (page 40) and the Eastern Kentucky Teacher's Network in Whitesburg, Kentucky (page 41). Some organizations, like Boys, Girls, Adults Community Development Center in Marvell, Arkansas (page 42-43) and Rural Organizing and Cultural Center in Holmes County, Mississippi (page 13) are multi-issue organizations in which education is one of several issues addressed. Some have worked through labor unions to bring about change, as have teachers in West Virginia (page 41). Other communities feel that much of the political system must change in order to bring about educational improvements, such as activists in Sylvester, Georgia (page 38) and Center for Community Action members in Robeson County, North Carolina (page 39).

PARENTS TAKING CONTROL

Some communities are working for more democratic control by replacing current decision-makers with people who are more representative of the community. Activists in Marrero, Louisiana, Sylvester, Georgia, and Robeson County, North Carolina believe that the things wrong with education are also the things wrong with other community institutions. They feel that political and education issues have to be addressed at the same time.

> *We had an all white male school board so we went to court to get redistricting. Now we have a black on the school board and we are looking forward to the next elections because we think we'll get more. We used to have a tendency to say political issues are not for us, but not now. If we don't keep a foot in the door, this is where decisions are made and how can we tell them what we want, how can we be heard? We still have seven white males on the council. We did have one woman but when election came, they got rid of her in a hurry. And we did have all white males on the housing authority commission for a long, long time. Finally we got them to appoint me to that. We fought and got a lot of things done that way. We really want to get majority black on the school board, and especially a woman. We have sexism. Women are always pushed to the side. But we are fighting. That's way we believe in organizing. Women and blacks should step in and make some decisions.*
>
> Rose Mary Smith
> Gulf Coast Tenant Association
> Marrero, Louisiana

A South Georgia activist and former teacher talks about the frustration of trying to work for change within the educational system, and the realization that in her community, political change had to accompany educational change.

> *There's a whole lot of things that's related to making schools better. We had no blacks on the School Board, no blacks on the County Commission, none on the City Council. In fact, we had no blacks working at the courthouse or at the polls. In one of the largest counties in Georgia, we only had 303 black registered voters. So I was angry with the system, and knowing what was happening, and knowing that as long as you are part of the system, there are things you're going to have to do because you are there. Once I retired, I helped my husband with the business, but he pushed me out there to do a lot of things. So I did become active, all the time looking at educational issues and at the self-esteem of our children who didn't feel like they could be anybody.*
>
> *At one time, our black schoolteachers were looked upon highly, but once integration came, many black teachers lost their jobs for one reason or another. We've found that many black kids have lost their respect for teaching that they once had. They lost their desire to get educated. We started back at that time to see what we could do to get some blacks involved with policy making. We wanted to get somebody elected to the City Council. We had at-large elections and after that one time, we couldn't get anybody else elected, even though we are 60% black. We couldn't get people to go register to vote. We asked for a black deputy registrar but we were turned down. The NAACP sued the state of Georgia and we got 18 black deputy registrars. That summer, we registered 1500 people. The mayor told us we would have the city divided into wards so that we could have a chance to get somebody elected to Council. But he didn't do it so we went to court and won. Now out of four council members, we have three blacks. We also did the same on the School Board, but won't have a chance to elect until 1991.*

We started this after school tutorial program. We had a hard time getting into the schools because they said we'd mess up the schools and we would be in the janitor's way but we got in anyway. That first year we had 200 and some kids enrolled that were failing. And we started a Summer Program and a Youth Leadership Program to help bring about change. Now we have 31 young people who are in the Leadership program. They go to School Board meetings, County Commission meetings, City Council meetings. We have a Youth Development Center that came about because young people wanted a place of their own.

Mary Shipp
Save The Children
Sylvester, Georgia

Until recently, five school systems operated within Robeson County, North Carolina. Many local activists saw these systems as ways to perpetuate inequities among communities. Center for Literacy Studies/ Highlander Center research showed an almost one thousand dollar difference between these systems in total amount spent per pupil in 1987-88. Saint Paul's City Schools spent $3025 per pupil and Red Springs City School spent $4006 per pupil. In this case, consolidation of the systems was a solution that many parents wanted, although they were not necessarily happy with the resulting closing of some schools.

We were successful in getting a merger of five school systems into one. The Governor hand-picked an interim board and the interim board elected an outsider for superintendent instead of an experienced Native American.

Kayron Maynor
Robeson County, North Carolina

As in many other communities, citizens in Robeson County have chosen to confront educational and social problems through community and political organizing.

I'm an organizer in Robeson County, Pembroke, North Carolina. I'm not a teacher, but I want to see children get a good education. Our schools just merged. It's been a long process with us but it's finally getting a little better. We're working with the Center for Community Action. Here in Robeson County, one or two people can't do anything. You have to have a group. Now we're going to monitor the school and find out more about what's happening inside. Already we were successful in stopping a 32% raise in our property taxes. So we've had victories as a group. We have seven cluster groups and we're working on redistricting. We don't have any black commissioners and we need some. We're working on lots of issues.

Helen Locklear
Center for Community Action
Robeson, North Carolina

Robeson County provides an example of both the complexities of problems and their solutions. In many areas, consolidation is viewed negatively, as a barrier to community control. However, citizens of Robeson County saw this situation differently and believed that an administrative merger would help correct injustices. This kind of diversity of solutions suggests that there is no one "correct" answer on educational questions; there are as many solutions as there are communities.

PARENTS IN THE SCHOOLS

In other communities, people have chosen to provide an alternative model for what schools could be. Often groups want to gain access to schools and participate fully in the educational process from inside the school. Groups such as Appalachian Communities for Children demonstrate the potential for parents

the school. Groups such as Appalachian Communities for Children demonstrate the potential for parents bringing important contributions to the schools, for showing alternative curriculum and process models to the public schools, and for making the community an integral part of the educational system.

We're a grassroots community group. We work in Eastern Kentucky, primarily in Jackson and Clay counties. When we first started our adult education program, other people were sure we would fail. Our idea was that we knew a lot of things and we could teach one another and what we didn't know, we could learn. We set up our own adult education program in Jackson and Clay counties. And now we are one of the few parent groups in Kentucky out of 120 counties that run the whole adult education program in the county. In almost all of the other counties, the school systems run the programs. In ours, the parents — low income parents — run the program. I want to bring you the good news that even though they said we were just a bunch of hillbillies, and we could never manage that, a couple of years ago, we won the Outstanding Adult Education award for having the best program in all of the South Central Kentucky counties. We were competing with 27 other counties and we had the third highest GED rate out of all the JTPA programs in Kentucky.

We don't have any certified teachers. We have a lot of parents who are very good at teaching other people. Some of our best teachers are students who learned and got their GED one year, then became teachers the next year. In Jackson County, 75% of adults 25 and over didn't finish high school. In Clay County, it's 72%. We decide as parents that we wanted to do something in our schools. It took us 6 years but we now have parent groups and we are now teaching in every public school in Jackson County every day of the week. And that's a miracle to achieve that. I think we knew certain things as parents, but I'm not sure we knew that we could change it, because we didn't have examples, we didn't have leadership, we didn't have an Annie [Wright, of BGACDC, see page 42]. It took us getting in the schools, finding our own ways of going about it, to make sense for us. We knew a lot of things, but when we got in there, we saw more and we came back and talked about it. We saw that things were happening in different hollers, but people didn't know about each others' experiences. It was people coming together and saying "What happened to you — that happened to me too!" We don't want to make it sound like it was easy. We've had some failures. It hurts to work hard and then not get something. And it doesn't happen fast. We didn't spring up full-grown. We went through a long, hard process in terms of our confidence and ability to handle what we wanted to do in the schools. It was really difficult in the beginning. We've gone from not being welcome in the schools to working very closely with them. This year we're doing workshops for teachers.

Judy Martin
Appalachian Communities for Children
McKee, Kentucky

ALTERNATIVES FOR TEACHERS

Teachers, too, are trying to do things in different ways. Some of the most exciting work comes from efforts of groups such as the Eastern Kentucky Teacher's Network (EKTN) who are redefining what it means for schools to be a part of the community, the nature of appropriate curriculum, and the importance of mutual teacher support.

We believe that kids can learn by studying their own community. Teachers can develop courses around what is happening in the community, they are aware of the cultural backgrounds of students.

Debbie Bays
Eastern Kentucky Teacher's Network
Hindman, Kentucky

The Eastern Kentucky Teacher's Network is one of 10 networks nationwide associated with the creators of the Foxfire series in Rabun Gap, Georgia. The Network, governed by a board of teachers elected from its membership, believes that students can be self-initiating learners when provided the right opportunities; that community-oriented teachers should have a major role in educational decision making; and parents should be respected as owners of the school.

EKTN addresses problems of teacher and student isolation in rural areas, and the inadequacies of formal school curriculum that sometimes seems not to address the needs of the people in rural Eastern Kentucky. The Computer Network allows member teachers to communicate with each other via their classroom or home computers. Regular meetings are held to exchange ideas and support. Staff travel to members' classrooms to help with alternative curriculum ideas, including student-produced magazines, videos and other hands-on projects. Teachers are engaged in discussions and other growth experiences around themes of increased teacher involvement in significant educational decision making, as well as the relationship and responsibilities of schools and communities to each other. They are working to create a curriculum that serves students in their lives outside of schools as well as within schools.

Labor struggles, too, can be a part of the consciousness-raising that goes on around education issues. In West Virginia, as in other places, participants in a teachers' strike examined questions of who benefits from the educational status quo, and who controls decision making. Sometimes whole communities are drawn into a critical re-thinking about the nature of education.

> *I'm an elementary school teacher. A teachers' strike has occurred over the past year. Teachers' strikes have happened all over the United States, nothing new. But it was new for West Virginia. There was a real opportunity for change in West Virginia. We were asking for the usual things: higher salaries — we're 49th. But what came out was that people who had never taken any political action began to do so.*
>
> *We're a state that's very wealthy, we have a lot of natural resources, but we've been ripped off. Coal has been taken out, never taxed the way it should have been. Lumber's been taken out. Instead of having good schools and good roads and good services for people, we've never had that. I've been in West Virginia almost 25 years , and for the first time during the teacher's strike you could hear people saying the tax structure has to be redone, we have to change the base ... We started looking back at some of the things the Appalachian Alliance did years ago on who owns the land? The question is, how do you take a social movement and push it in a direction that will benefit everybody? It's not just that the teachers need more money, but kids need lots of things. The Legislature may offer teachers more money, but that's not enough. That's not all we need. One thing they're talking about is just consolidating schools, lay off teachers, increase class size, and that would be awful.*
>
> *Being here at Highlander for the Myles memorial made me remember that he's written to forget this desperation stuff; it's only through hope that real movements begin. For us, in West Virginia, a lot of the impetus came from our county. One night the teachers got together and voted — that's it, we're out. And it was really strange, because we have the reputation for being real chickens. There'd been one-day walkouts before, and we'd never done it. The reason we did it this time is that the year before we had a small victory. At a board meeting where they voted to raise our superintendent's salary to $90,000, they also voted to close 4 schools. I'd never seen anything like it. People went bananas. People were just honestly and genuinely disgusted. The parents shut down some schools. They picketed and asked teachers not to cross the picket lines. There was a lot of turmoil. I remember as I sat with my group outside the principal came and said I've been*

told you are going to lose your job if you don't cross the picket lines. It was very hard. Most people had never confronted a picket line. We had a victory. The school board accused the teachers of organizing it. But really, it was a community thing.

So I think the power structure does us a real favor. Thank goodness they never learn this lesson. They do something outrageous; we get together and something comes out of it. I think there have been some small victories, so we are ready to go on. Every time people come together and start talking to each other, it doesn't end.

Judy Robinson
Beckley, West Virginia

MULTI-ISSUE COMMUNITY GROUPS

One of the most consistently successful approaches to community involvement in education seems to be the creation and nurture of diverse, multi-issue citizens' groups who see education as one of several areas of work. These groups, such as the Rural Organizing and Cultural Center at Lexington, Mississippi and Boys, Girls, Adults Community Development Center in Marvell, Arkansas, don't just mobilize around an issue but rather organize for long-term involvement and empowerment of members. They practice in their own organizations the democratic, participatory principles they believe in for schools. (See ROCC Box Page 13).

I'm from a town called Marvell, Arkansas, which is deep in the Delta and I'm sure you know there's a lot of problems in the Delta like everywhere else. I work in an educational program at a place called Boys, Girls, Adults Community Development Center (BGACDC). BGACDC was founded by parents and we work on the things our members bring to us as concerns. We are a vehicle to carry out the work they want to see done and be a part of. That is really unique. So many agencies mandate and control community and educational work, and never consider what the people want.

Our success is due to a strong Board. They are not a board that's there in name only. They work! We have a great Director and a competent staff. And our organization is grounded in the community; it is of the community.

The educational component of BGACDC has a home-based preschool program. The program was started when we saw that so many of our children were failing first grade. And there weren't enough Headstart or other programs to work with all the kids. We use the Home Instruction Program for Preschool Youngsters (HIPPY). We work in a role play setting, teaching parents ways to work with kids. We bring the children together one day a week as a group to work and play together.

We have a tutorial program for fifth through eighth graders where high school students help younger students and all participate in group discussions and hear guest speakers. And, we have a library with encyclopedias and dictionaries and other books and magazines. That in itself can mean a lot to students who need these resources but don't have them at home. All these things didn't just happen overnight. Sure, we've made mistakes and sometimes it's been real hard. Lots of people didn't think we'd make it this far.

I also sit on the School Board as President. This is the first change in the Board that has happened in 20 years. I am the first black female to sit on that Board. The Board was run by a white man, an Anglo, who had all the power anybody thought a person could have. Our group works toward empowerment of parents. That's what we deal with. We start with parents of preschoolers, with a home based program. We ask them what do you think needs to be done? Through the preschool program, out of that came a parent group. That parent group was where it all started. It hasn't

stopped and I don't think it will stop. People got a trust in the program, and trusted me. I guess that's how I became chair of the board.

In our program, we're working with parents. We're training our kids before they get to the school system. We're developing some attitudes before that public school gets them. I sit on that board not because I have all the faith in the world in public schools, but because I know that through this some things can be done that wouldn't be done if I wasn't there. I've cried many nights about the things that go on, pray all the time. Parents have just been my foothold. I believe in them and they believe in me.

I don't deal with how the community accepts things, or how they learn, on the school board level. I deal with that in my group, BGACDC. I have a closer contact with the community through BGACDC than through the school board. It may seem strange or unusual. Even though I am on the school board, people are still intimidated by that system. BGACDC is at a level where I can really talk and communicate with people. That's my vehicle. That's my only true means of getting to parents and letting them know what's happening. Even though I'm chair of the board, that board still maintains some control over me because I'm only one individual. So I believe that the way to get things done is through my organization.

Annie Wright
BGACDC
Marvell, Arkansas

ORGANIZE!

If people become organized, they can make system changes on any issue, not just school. The focus should be on organizing, not mobilizing. People mobilize and then disperse when the issue is decided. But an organized community can deal with things effectively.

Anne Brown
Rural Organizing and Cultural Center
Lexington, Mississippi

Among all the diverse ways to work on education issues, several beliefs and approaches seem to be common.

Organize. To bring about change, power is needed. Power comes from the unified, focused, consistent application of pressure, almost always from a group. People in unions, churches, citizens groups and other organized bodies are in a better position to bring about change.

Education can't be separated from the rest of our community. Even though groups may chose to focus on education, we all have to be concerned about political, social, economic and other forces that shape education. Positive change in education (such as greater community involvement) almost always means positive changes in other areas of community life.

Groups are powerful tools to bring about change. People inside groups grow and change, become more skilled and confident as they work on issues. The strongest, most long-lasting groups are ones who pay attention to their internal health and try to make their vision for a just, democratic world come true in their own groups.

We have lots of groups coming through Highlander—environment, toxics, economic development. One thing I've learned from you all is that if we don't put education on each of those agendas, we won't be able to win on any of them. How can we solve environmental problems in communities if kids are being taught that their communities aren't worth fighting for? I've also learned from you that as you work in your communities, you aren't dealing with education as a separate issue. It's just one more thing in Selma, Alabama, or Sylvester, Georgia, or Marvell, Arkansas that you are working on. As other groups come to Highlander, we'll be trying to encourage them to look at education as part of their work.

John Gaventa
Highlander Research and Education Center
New Market, Tennessee

CONCLUSIONS

Many people in rural communities have deep concerns about education, and are devoting much energy and hard work to educational issues at the local level. The Highlander Rural Education Convocation shows how parents and others are acting on those concerns in a variety of ways.

But the convocation also indicated that for the most part people are immersed in their local problems, and usually have no way to talk to other communities, to share strategies, to learn from others' experiences. Because local activists are often isolated, they have little chance to develop a unified vision for education, or to identify entry points for making changes in education systems.

The process of the convocation, enabling collective reflection, sharing and strategizing by community activists, began to develop a new perspective on rural education. Visions were developed and shared. Concerns and issues were identified, and new ways of gaining community input into education systems shared.

The convocation also forced us to think more clearly about what is unique to rural education, and what problems are more broad-based. People in these rural communities usually do not see being rural as a unifying backdrop to their local issues and struggles. This may be because they have so little opportunity to meet and identify with other rural communities. It may be because being rural per se is a unifying factor on only some issues, like financing and consolidation. Other issues, like sorting and screening, or curriculum, may not be distinctively rural.

While some concerns were very localized, many common threads ran through the discussion of the convocation. We can identify a number of key issues regarding community involvement in education.

The barriers to local citizen impact on education systems are many and varied. The more removed from the community educational institutions become, the more barriers exist to citizen action. The distance may be physical (as when rural schools are consolidated); it may be in terms of layers of bureaucracy; it may involve differences in values and cultures or concepts of "expertise;" it may be based in class or race. These barriers need to be dismantled in our thinking about educational reform: we need to bring schools closer to, rather than further from, community involvement.

Existing structures for community input into education often appear to be out of touch with the broader community. PTAs and PTOs, school boards and other committees often represent only some of the community. Typically they leave out the poorest parents, and people of color.

New kinds of organizations are emerging to give a voice to local citizens. Community groups involved in the convocation showed great diversity in their form and the issues on which they chose to concentrate. In some cases, parent groups were closely involved in the schools on a daily basis. In others, the focus of concentration was on the decision-making arena, of school boards and county government.

Education issues are such that only sustained long-term efforts can make a difference. Local stories make it clear that it is often difficult to sustain citizen efforts. Often, people are mobilized around a particular issue but then disappear when it is resolved or found intractable. It is hard to put together a sustained, long-term effort, and ongoing support from the outside may be needed for that to happen.

Whatever their chosen issue, community groups organizing around educational issues need help, as other community-based groups do, in leadership development and other aspects of organizing. They need more opportunity to practice and engage in developing strategies, organizing and building community support, in order to find avenues for action.

Communities also need help in accessing and translating technical issues and information, for it to be useable and meaningful to them. Many educational issues are phrased in terms which people find hard to identify with and understand. Like school finances, these issues can seem remote, the domain of experts, not issues on which ordinary people can have a voice. People need technical assistance to understand tracking policies and practices, identification of special needs, discipline policies and practices, and finance and budget issues. These issues need to be made more accessible in order for people to develop a sense of the value of their community perspective.

Community groups also need a better understanding of how decisions are made. On curriculum, for example, it is seldom clear how much is up to the teacher, how much mandated by the local school system (and by whom) and how much by the state (and by whom). Besides understanding *who* decides, it is also unclear *on what basis* decisions are made.

Much work needs to be done in thinking about what a quality curriculum might be for small rural schools. Efforts like *Bloodlines* and *Foxfire*, which value local culture and history, have an important contribution to make to that debate. They demonstrate that rural education can be *both* high quality and innovative, unrestrained by the "standards" usually set by local and state educational institutions. Education needs to prepare students for life in the twenty-first century, but to ground it strongly in the history, culture and values of the community.

The sorting and tracking function of schools continues, and is perceived by many as reflecting class and race biases. National statistics and local experiences both suggest that equality of education remains an ideal not realized in our society. Community groups need to be able to analyze the practice of their education system, and to find ways to challenge unfair procedures which label children from particular class and racial backgrounds.

The discussions at the convocation lead to the question of how to get education on everyone's agenda. There are many groups which have been effective on other community issues, but have never taken on education. Given the technical difficulty of educational issues, and the need for sustaining long-term effort and intervention, we need to look toward involving diverse, multi-issue community groups in education along with other community issues. In addition, work should continue in developing the capacity of single issue education-oriented groups to develop long-term and effective intervention. Highlander and institutions like it need to develop support for this process and for the groups' ongoing work on their issues.

Now may be an important time to build an alternative approach to educational change. Nationally an education reform movement is underway. But the voices of parents and others in rural communities are seldom heard in this national debate. Much work needs to be done in empowering local communities to define for themselves the education issues they want to tackle.

Supporting the development of such work at the local level is only part of what needs to be done. Many decisions are made and agendas set beyond the local arena. Communities need to join together to share effective models of community involvement in educational reform, and to have significant input at the state and national levels in the education debate. Highlander hopes to continue its involvement in education issues, and to support the growth of a strong and coherent voice for parents and others in rural communities.

[In my vision] There would be a school in each community. In each school, there would be one teacher for 15 children, so she could give them the best attention possible. This is in all levels, K - 12. We'd have an open-door policy. Parents could come in at any time and we'd have special things to invite them to. We'd have field trips once a week, because children have to have experiences to learn. They'd take field trips all over the state and they'd come back and have lessons on what they saw, heard and experienced. If a teacher wanted to take her kids outside and sit on the grass, she could. A teacher could do anything she wanted to do. This is a real dream! Teachers are expected to have a plan. Each teacher would get about $10,000 a year for extracurricular activities and for the classroom because the money is not used for central office staff. There'd be no principal either. There's a lead teacher, someone who has spent 20 years in the classroom and knows about education on all levels, who goes for regular training and is still a human being. There are male teachers. They have come back to the classroom because now they are getting respect. The State Superintendent actually visits the school. The parents come on a regular basis. They support the teachers. Grass and trees are all around the building. The children grow up and they are competent human beings because when they were little in school, they were loved and they knew people cared about them; they felt worthy.

Veronica Thomas
Taxpayers Advocacy Support Coalition
Hardeeville, South Carolina

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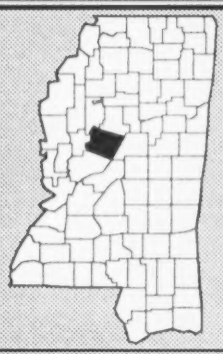
APPENDIX A
SAMPLE COMMUNITY EDUCATION PROFILE

Holmes County, Mississippi

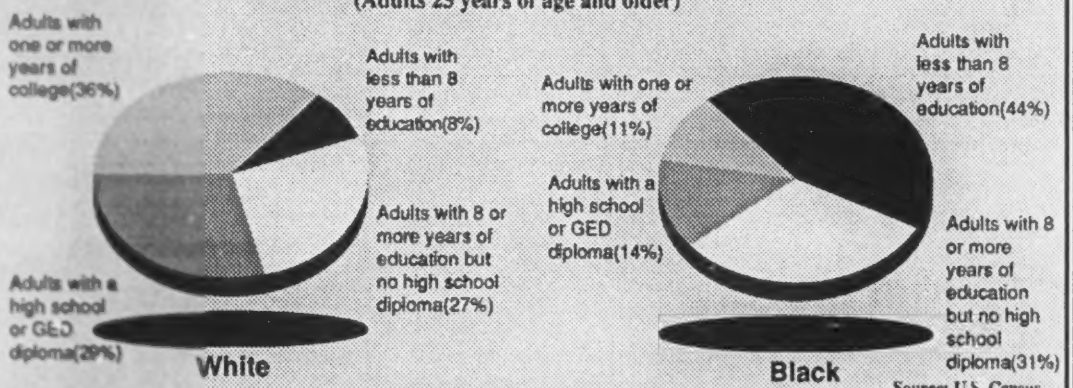
POPULATION (1986) 22,900

RACIAL COMPOSITION:		FAMILIES BELOW POVERTY LEVEL:
WHITE	29%	9%
BLACK	71%	55%



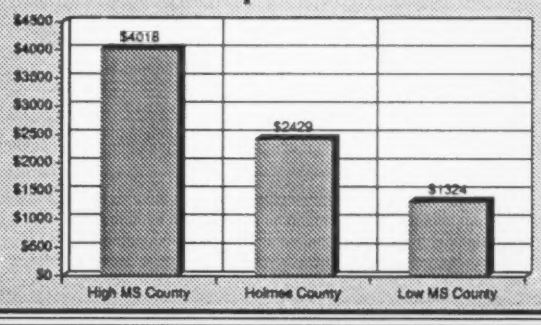
Education Level of Adults (1980)

(Adults 25 years of age and older)


Adults with one or more years of college(36%)
Adults with less than 8 years of education(8%)
Adults with 8 or more years of education but no high school diploma(27%)
Adults with a high school or GED diploma(29%)
White
Adults with one or more years of college(11%)
Adults with less than 8 years of education(44%)
Adults with a high school or GED diploma(14%)
Adults with 8 or more years of education but no high school diploma(31%)
Black

Source: U.S. Census

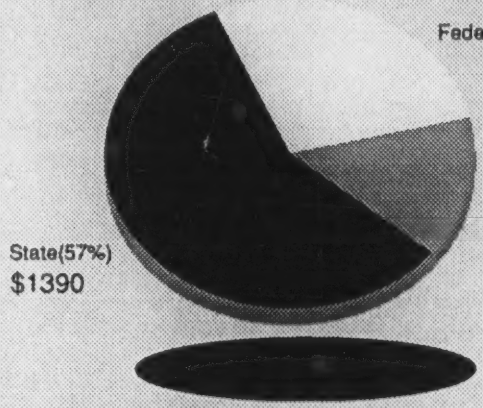
Comparison of School Expenditures Per Student (1986-87)



Source: U.S. Census

Prepared for Highlander Research and Education Center
Center for Literacy Studies / The University of Tennessee / 102 Claxton Education Building
Knoxville, Tennessee 37996; May 1990

Sources of Funds for Education* (1988)

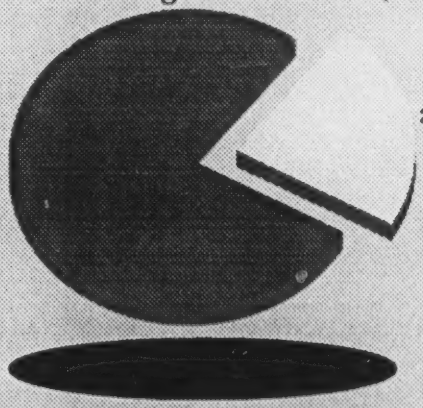


Total $2429

* per pupil

Source: MS State Dept. of Education

Total State Budget Allocation (1985-86)



23% Spent on elementary and secondary education

($448.70 per capita*)

* per capita population in state; NOT per pupil

Source: U.S. Dept. of Education

Public / Private School Enrollment by Race (1980)

Elementary:

	White	Black
Public	62%	99%
Private	38%	1%

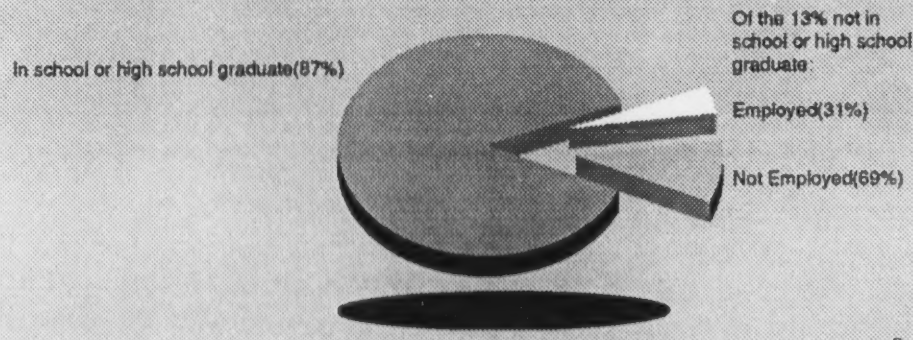
High School:

	White	Black
Public	62%	98%
Private	38%	2%

Source: U.S. Census

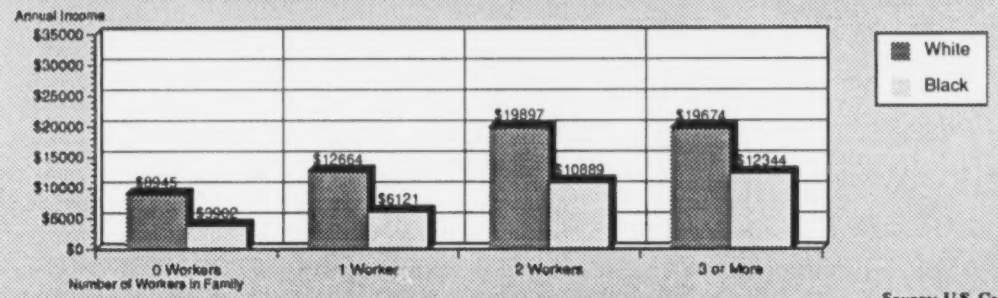
Prepared for Highlander Research and Education Center
Center for Literacy Studies / The University of Tennessee / 102 Claxton Education Building
Knoxville, Tennessee 37996; May 1990

Labor Force Status of 16-19 Year Olds (1980)



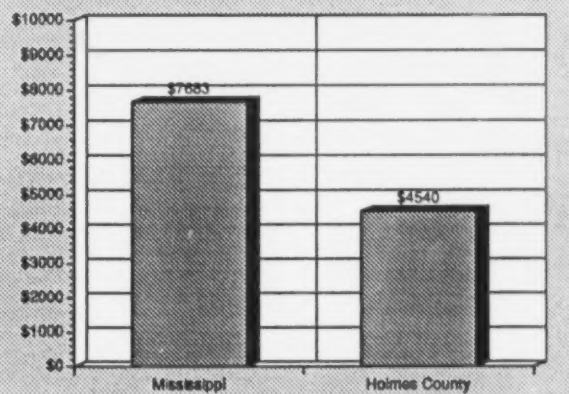
Source: U.S. Census

Family Income by Number of Workers (1980)



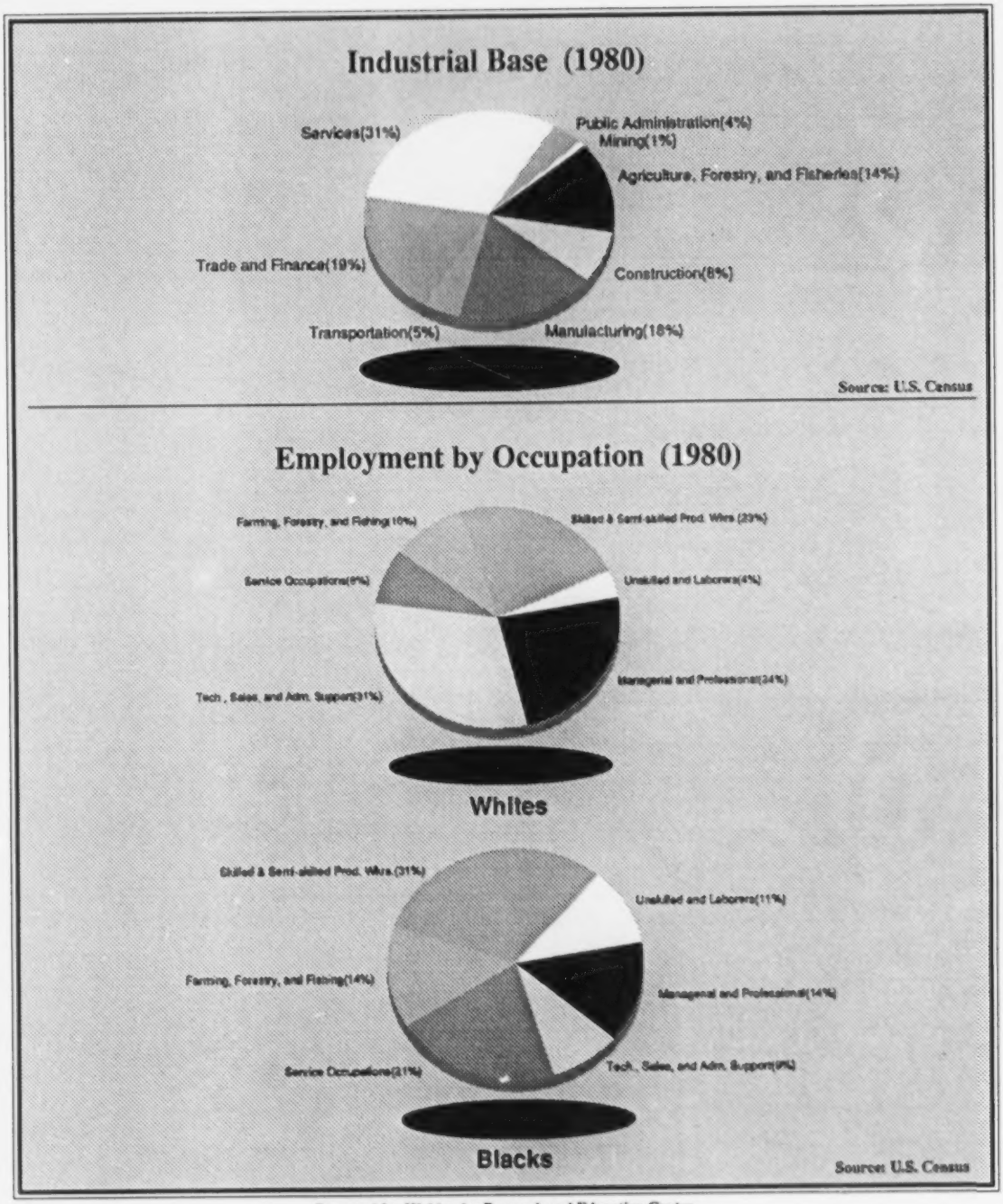
Source: U.S. Census

Per Capita Income (1985)



Source: U.S. Census

Prepared for Highlander Research and Education Center
Center for Literacy Studies / The University of Tennessee / 102 Claxton Education Building
Knoxville, Tennessee 37996; May 1990



Prepared for Highlander Research and Education Center
Center for Literacy Studies / The University of Tennessee / 102 Claxton Education Building
Knoxville, Tennessee 37996; May 1990

APPENDIX B
GETTING INFORMATION

This is a story about getting information from the Federal government. The Center for Literacy Studies wanted to document the racial composition of the student bodies in public and private schools. We also were interested in the racial composition of the public school workforce, the incidence of corporal punishment, suspension and expulsion, the identification of handicapping conditions, and other information. We called the Department of Education, Office of Civil Rights (OCR).

After several calls, in which we were passed from person to person, we finally learned that they had much but not all of the information we wanted and that it is all accessible to the public under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA). They don't have workforce or expulsion statistics, or statistics on private schools. The OCR people suggested we request workforce information from the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, (EEOC) which we did. We were pleased to hear that by law, OCR must respond to FOIA information requests within 10 working days of receipt. And, unless lots of copying is required, the information is free. This was going to be simple and quick!

We set about filing our Freedom of Information request. One of the first problems was that OCR couldn't pick out the exact information we wanted from the pages and pages submitted by local school districts. They had to send all of the information compiled by each district, even what we didn't want, and we would have to pay for the extra copying. So we made more calls and were eventually sucessful in getting an exemption from paying copying costs, on the grounds that our publication of this information was in the public interest.

During the course of these conversations (each one a costly long distance call) we were told that since the school districts we were inquiring about were located in different OCR regions, we would need to send the requests to different OCR offices. So...more calls to find out which requests went to which offices. We finally got them all mailed. A few days later we were told that the staff person had been wrong, that the requests should all go to the Washington FOIA office. Our requests were referred to a program officer, who worked on them a couple of weeks, then went on leave. The new staff person, apparently overwhelmed by taking over extra work, didn't return our calls. When we finally talked to the new staff person, we had to start over with explanations of what we wanted, to what use the material would be put, and how we were exempted from the copying costs.

Meanwhile, one of the regional OCR offices wrote back to say that it was necessary to exceed the 10-day limit in replying to our request. Most we never heard from. The Washington OCR office eventually sent a very small part of the information we requested, promised more, but were never heard from again. We did hear back from EEOC, who turned down our request for the racial composition of administrative and teaching staff. They did, however, suggest we contact the Department of Education, who had sent us to EEOC in the first place!

We told part of this sad story in one of the Highlander rural education workshops. One of the activists there - Page McCullough - happened to know that the National Coalition of Advocates for Students had much of the information we were seeking. It turned out that NCAS did provide us with lots of information. (Interestingly, NCAS gets the data from OCR, but goes through a long and arduous process to obtain it each year.)

So this story is not only about a good law that provides citizens access to important information, but also about how bureaucracy and even well-meaning individuals can obstruct it.

APPENDIX C
RESOURCES

1. Local sources of information useful to organizing on education issues may include:

   Local PTA/PTO

   Local American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) chapter*

   Local Legal Services office*

   Local American Federation of Teachers (AFT) or National Education Association (NEA) affliate*

* contact national office (address below) for local information

2. Key government agencies regarding curriculum, budget, staffing and decision-making:

   Local School Board

   County government (for finance)

   State Departments of Education

   United States Department of Education
   400 Maryland Avenue, S.W.
   Washington, D.C. 20202

   For civil rights issues - racial and gender bias in education:

   Office of Civil Rights
   United States Department of Education
   400 Maryland Avenue, S.W.
   Washington, D.C. 20202
   FOIA Officer: Anne Vaughn

3. Other organizations concerned with education issues:

   Groups participating in the Highlander Rural Education workshops — See Appendix D and contact Highlander Center for addresses.

   Association for the Education of Young Children
   1834 Connecticut Avenue, N.W.
   Washington, DC 20009

   Atlantic Center for Research and Education (ACRE)
   316 S. Gregson Street
   Durham, North Carolina 27701

   Design for Change
   220 South State St., Suite 1900
   Chicago, Illinois 60604
   Sue Davenport

Foxfire
Rabun Gap, Georgia 30568
Eliot Wigginton

Kentucky Youth Advocates
833 E. Main Street
Frankfort, KY 40601
David Riechart

Massachusetts Advocacy Center
95 Berkeley Street
Suite 302
Boston, Massachusettes 02116
Steve Bing

National Coalition of Chapter I Parents
Edmonds School Building Room 201
9th and D Street, NW
Washington, DC 20002
Robert Witherspoon

National Congress of Parents and Teachers
700 N. Rush Street
Chicago, Illinois 60611

Southern Coalition for Educational Equity
P. O. Box 22904
Jackson, Mississippi 39205
Winifred Green

4. For national, state, and some local statistics on racial composition of public schools, incidence of corporal punishment and suspension, and identification of handicapping conditions:

National Coalition of Advocates for Students
100 Boylston Street
Suite 737
Boston, Massachusetts 02116
Richard Gray

5. For information on various education issues, status of teacher organizing, salaries and working conditions:

American Federation of Teachers
555 New Jersey Avenue, N.W.
Washington, DC 20001

National Education Association
1201 16th Street, N.W.
Washington, DC 20036

6. For information on student and parents' rights, education law, and help with locating legal assistance for eligible people:

American Civil Liberties Union
132 West 43rd Street
New York, New York 10036

National Legal Aid and Defender Association
1625 K Street, NW
Washington, DC 20006

National Center for Law and Education
236 Massachusetts Avenue, NE
Suite 504
Washington, DC 20002
Paul Weckstein

FOR FURTHER READING

Bastian, A. and Fructor, N. Choosing Equality: The Case for Democratic Schooling. Temple University Press: 1986.

Massachusetts Advocacy Center. Locked In/Locked Out: Tracking and Placement Practices in Boston Public School. 1990.

Oakes, Jeannie. Keeping Track: How Schools Structure Inequality. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985.

Sher, Jonathan. Education in Rural America. Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1977.

APPENDIX D
HIGHLANDER RURAL EDUCATION PROJECT
PARTICIPANTS LIST

Debbie Bays
Eastern Kentucky Teacher's Network
Hindman, Kentucky

Gail Blackshear
Taxpayers Advocacy Support Coalition
Hardeeville, South Carolina

John Bloch
Littleton, New Hampshire

Bucky Boone
Washington County Office on Youth
Abingdon, Virginia

Alice Boynton
Best Educational Support Team
Selma, Alabama

Ann Brown
Rural Organizing Cultural Center
Lexington, Mississippi

Vicki Creed
Knoxville, Tennessee

Ron Davis
Highlander Research & Education Center
New Market, Tennessee

Betty Ewing
Gulf Coast Tenants Association
Gulfport, Mississippi

John Gaventa
Highlander Research & Education Center
New Market, Tennessee

Anne Hablas
Mountain Women's Exchange
Jellico, Tennessee

Rod Johnson
New World Foundation
New York, New York

Christina Johnston
Worcester, Vermont

Frederick Lee
Best Educational Support Team
Selma, Alabama

David Locklear
Center for Community Action
Lumberton, North Carolina

Helen Locklear
Center for Community Action
Lumberton, North Carolina

Sanford Locklear
Center for Community Action
Lumberton, North Carolina

Judy Martin
Appalachian Communities for Children
McKee, Kentucky

Linda Martin
Burton, West Virginia

Kayron Maynor
Pembroke, North Carolina

Page McCullough
Literacy South
Durham, North Carolina

Juliet Merrifield
Center for Literacy Studies
Knoxville, Tennessee

Lamar Moody
Villa Rica, Georgia

Carolyn Murdock
Cherokee Challenge
Cherokee, North Carolina

Judy Robinson
Beckley, West Virginia

Mary Jane Shipp
Save the Children
Sylvester, Georgia

Jane Sapp
Springfield, Massachusetts

Rose Mary Smith
Gulf Coast Tenants Organization
Marrero, Louisiana

Ruth Queen Smith
Fairview, Tennessee

Beth Spence
Alum Creek, West Virginia

Jenna Thomas
Southern Teens Acting Responsibly
Hardeeville, South Carolina

Veronica Thomas
Taxpayers Advocacy Support Coalition
Hardeeville, South Carolina

Connie Tucker
Best Educational Support Team
Selma, Alabama

Connie White
Center for Literacy Studies
Knoxville, Tennessee

Jada Williams
Southern Teens Acting Responsibly
Hardeeville, South Carolina

Annie Wright
Boys, Girls, Adults Community
Development Center
Marvell, Arkansas